

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK's
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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LIEUTENANT
HARALD AND THE
TREASURE
ISLAND
TREASURE

by Margaret Maron



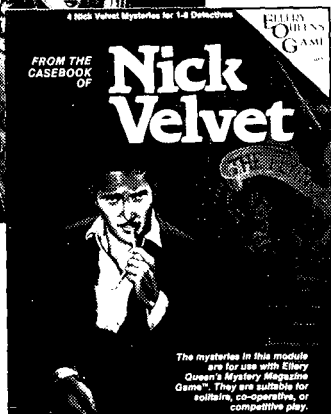
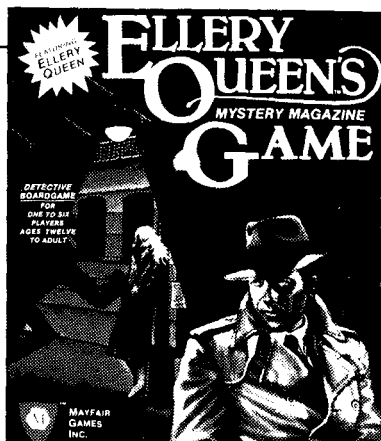
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CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

LIEUTENANT HARALD AND THE TREASURE ISLAND TREASURE by Margaret Maron	4
IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO by Terry Black	17
A DECEITFUL WAY OF DYING by Dick Stodghill	27
MULTIPLE SUBMISSIONS by Catherine L. Stanton	51
WHAT GOES AROUND by Wayne L. Tappan	68
CHARLIE'S SPRING BREAK by Allen M. Widem	88
DECEIVING APPEARANCES by Donald Olson	102

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE OPEN DOOR by Mrs. Oliphant	114
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DEPARTMENTS

GUEST EDITORIAL by Mary Cannon	2
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	67
UNSOLVED by Guy Savant	87
SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED"	149
BOOKED & PRINTED by Carol Harper	150
MURDER BY DIRECTION by William Heller	153
THE STORY THAT WON	155

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COVER BY GARY KELLEY

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GUEST EDITORIAL

by Mary Cannon

Sunday, April 23, 1989: Silver Spring, Md.: 6:30 P.M. It's over now; everyone's packing to go home. The stewards in the large upstairs conference room are picking up discarded programs, abandoned plates, crumpled napkins and half-filled cups of cold tea. The "Agatha" award winners are plotting just where to proudly display their prize teapots. The rest of us are trying to cram autographed books, rolls of film, and rumpled finery into suitcases that seem to have mysteriously shrunk over the weekend. And, one suspects, all the attendees are storing lively quotes and personal anecdotes about their favorite authors in order to relate them to their envious friends back home, the unfortunates who weren't able to attend the First—and we

hope, Annual—Malice Domestic Convention.

What, you may ask, was Malice Domestic? Considering that this was its first year, I thought the organizers did an admirable job of publicizing it. Of course, even if you saw an ad for Malice Domestic (tastefully illustrated with a silver tea service), that wouldn't necessarily answer your question. I'm not sure that I have a definitive answer either, other than to quote from the opening essay in the convention program: "Malice Domestic brings murder and mystery right into our own lifestyle," says Mary Morman, the Moriarty of Malice Domestic, the chief perpetrator of this nefarious plot to celebrate murder in the "home." Unlike the cop or private eye,

(continued on page 100)

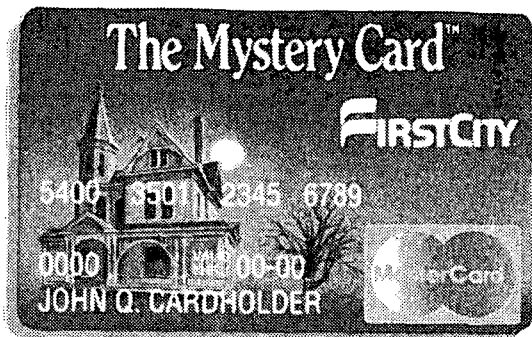
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FICTION

Lieutenant Harald and the *Treasure Island* Treasure

by
**Margaret
Maron**

Illustration by Thomas Fleming

4
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"I thought you liked puzzles," argued Oscar Nauman's disembodied voice.

"I do," Lieutenant Sigrid Harald answered, balancing the telephone receiver on her shoulder as she struggled with a balky can opener. "That's one of the reasons I joined the NYPD. I get paid for it, Nauman. I don't have to waste a free weekend."

"But this is a real buried treasure. One of my former students is going to lose her inheritance if it isn't found soon, and I told her we'd help."

As one of America's leading abstract artists, Oscar Nauman could have sold one or two paintings a year and lived in comfortable retirement on some Mediterranean island. Instead, he continued to chair the art department at Vanderlyn College over on the East River where Sigrid first met him during a homicide investigation. The end of the case hadn't been the end of their acquaintance, though. He kept walking in and out of her life as if he had a right there, lecturing, bullying, and keeping her off balance. Her prickly nature seemed to amuse him, and Sigrid had quit trying to analyze why he persisted.

Or why she allowed it.

"We can drive up tonight."

said Nauman. "Unless," he added craftily, knowing her aversion to sunrises, "you'd rather leave around six tomorrow morning?"

"Now listen, Nauman, I don't —" The can opener slipped. "Oh, damn! I just dumped soup all over the blasted stove."

"Throw it out. I'll pick you up in thirty minutes and we'll have dinner on the way."

"I am *not* going to Connecticut," she said firmly, but he had already hung up.

Fourteen hours later, she sat on the terrace of Nauman's Connecticut house and placidly bit into a second Danish. A good night's sleep had removed most of her annoyance at being dragged from the city and hurtled through the night at Nauman's usual speed-of-sound driving. The sun was shining, the air was warm, and she had found an unworked double-croctic in an elderly issue of the *New York Times*.

She looked contented as a cat, thought Nauman. Her long dark hair was pinned at the nape more loosely than usual, and her faded jeans and cream-colored knit shirt were more becoming than those shapeless pantsuits she wore in town. Thin to the point of skinniness, with a mouth too wide for con-

ventional beauty and a neck too long, her cool gray eyes were her best feature, but these were presently engrossed in her paper.

He'd been up for hours and was so impatient to be off that he swept cups, carafe, and the remaining sweet rolls back onto the large brass tray and carted it all away without asking Sigrid if she'd finished.

"I thought your friend wasn't expecting us before ten," she said, following Nauman to the kitchen where she retrieved her cup and refilled it while he loaded the dishwasher.

"It'll take us about that long to walk over." He took her cup and poured it in the sink.

"Walk?" Sigrid was appalled.

"Less than a mile as the crow flies. You walk more than that every day."

"But that's on concrete," she protested. "In the city. You're talking about trees and snakes and briars, aren't you?"

"It used to be an Indian trading path," Nauman coaxed, leading her out through the terrace gate. "It'll be like a walk through Central Park."

"I hate walking in Central Park," Sigrid muttered, but she followed him across a narrow meadow to a scrub forest. As Nauman disappeared behind a curtain of wild grapevines, she hesitated a moment, then took

a deep breath and plunged in after him.

Ten minutes later, sweaty, her ankles whipped by thorns, a stinging scratch on her arm, she was ready for mutiny. "No Indians ever walked through this jungle."

"Not this part. We're taking a shortcut. The path is just past those tall oaks."

"If it isn't, I'm going back."

But it was; and once they were on it, the walk became more pleasant. Sigrid was used to covering twenty-five or thirty city blocks at a stretch, but she was deeply suspicious of nature in the raw. Still, it was cooler under the massive trees in this part of the forest. The path angled downward and was so broad that no branches caught at her clothing. She began to relax. They crossed a small stream on stepping stones and the path rose gently again.

As Nauman paused to re-tie his sneaker, a large black bird lazily flapped along overhead in their general direction.

"That crow of navigational fame, no doubt," said Sigrid.

Her smiles were so rare, thought Oscar, that one forgot they transformed her face. She was more than twenty-five years younger than he and nearly as tall and she photographed badly, but perhaps a painting? He hadn't attempted a portrait

since his student days.

"Hi, Oscar!" came a little voice from the top of the path. "Welcome to Treasure Island."

To Sigrid, Jemima Bullock looked like a thoroughly nice child as she ran down to meet them in cut-off jeans. She was sturdily built, athletic rather than buxom, with short reddish-blond hair, an abundance of freckles on every inch of visible skin, and an infectious grin as Nauman effected introductions.

"Jemima's the art world's contribution to oceanography."

"What Oscar means is that he's eternally grateful I didn't stay an art major at Vandervlyn," Jemima explained cheerfully. "My technical drawing was good, but I bombed in creativity."

"At least you had the native wit to admit it," Nauman said.

At the top of the path, they rounded a hummock of wisteria and honeysuckle vines to find an old cottage of undressed logs. A wide porch ran its length and gave good views of rolling woodlands and of Jemima's battered VW van, which was parked on the drive beneath an enormous oak.

"My uncle was caretaker for the Rawlings estate," said Jemima, leading them up on the porch and pulling wicker chairs

around a bamboo table. "The main house is farther down the drive, but no one's lived there for years. Uncle Jim mostly had the place to himself.

What looked like a small telescope on a tripod stood at the far end of the porch. "He called this Spyglass Hill but that's really a surveyor's transit."

"Nauman said his hobby was Robert Louis Stevenson," said Sigrid. "Is that why you welcomed us to Treasure Island?"

"Partly, but Uncle Jim was nutty about only one of Stevenson's books: *Treasure Island*. He was my mother's favorite uncle, see, and their name was Hawkins; so when he was a kid, he used to pretend he was Jim Hawkins in the book. Mom named me Jemima Hawkins Bullock after him, and, since he never married, we were pretty close. I used to spend a month up here every summer when I was growing up. He's the one who got me interested in oceanography, though it started off with treasure maps. Every summer he'd have a new one waiting for me."

She darted into the house and reappeared a moment later with a book and a large leather-bound portfolio of charts which she spread out on the porch table.

"This is a survey map of the area," she said. Her finger

stabbed a small black square. "Here's this cottage." She traced a short route. "Here's Oscar's house and the path and stream you crossed. See the way the stream comes up and intersects the creek here? And then the creek runs back down and around where a second stream branches off and merges again with the first stream."

"So technically, we really are on an island," said Sigrid, obscurely pleased with that idea.

"A body of land surrounded by water," Nauman agreed. He pulled out his pipe and worked at getting it lit.

"The freaky thing is that it's actually shaped like the original Treasure Island," said Jemima. She flipped the book open to an illustration. To Sigrid's eyes, the two were only roughly similar, but she supposed that wishful thinking could rationalize the differences.

"Uncle Jim made all these treasure maps for me. So many paces to a certain tree while I was small; later he taught me how to use a sextant and I'd have to shoot the stars to get the proper bearing. He didn't make it easy, either. It usually took two or three days and several false starts to find the right place to dig. It was worth it, though."

Sigrid leafed through the

sheaf of hand-drawn charts. Although identical in their outlines, each was exquisitely embellished with different colored inks: tiny sailing ships, mermaids, and dolphins sported in blue waters around elaborate multi-pointed compasses. Latitude and longitude lines had been carefully lettered in India ink, along with minute numbers and directions. Sigrid peered closely and read, "Bulk of treasure here."

"He never made much money as a caretaker," said Jemima, "but the treasures he used to hide! Chocolates wrapped in gold and purple foil, a pair of binoculars I still use, maps and drawing pads and compasses so I could draw my own." There was a wistful note in her voice as of a child describing never-to-come-again Christmas mornings.

"Tell her about the real treasure," Nauman prompted, bored with the preliminaries.

"I'm coming to it, Oscar. Be patient. She has to understand how Uncle Jim's mind worked first—the way he liked making a mystery of things. It wasn't only his maps," she told Sigrid. "He never talked freely about his life, either. He'd trained as a surveyor but seldom held a steady job till after his leg was hurt—just bummed around the world till he was past thirty. I

last hope, Lieutenant Harald. Oscar said you're good at solving puzzles. I hope you can figure out this one 'cause nobody else can."

Sigrid looked at Nauman. "But I don't know a thing about sextants or surveyor's transits, and anyhow, if he died before he finished the map—"

"Nobody's asking you to go tramping through hill and dale with a pickax," Nauman said, correctly interpreting her horrified expression. "Jemima doesn't think he'd buried it yet."

"Come inside and I'll show you," said the girl.

In essence, the cottage was one big room, with kitchen equipment at one end and two small sleeping alcoves at the other end separated by a tiny bath. A shabby couch and several comfortable looking armchairs circled an enormous stone fireplace centered on the long rear wall. A bank of windows overlooked the porch, and underneath were shelves crammed with books of all shapes and sizes. Most were various editions of—"What else?" said Jemima—*Treasure Island*. In the middle of the room was a round wooden table flanked by six ladderback chairs, one of which was draped in an old and worn woollen pea jacket with heavy brass buttons. A rusty metal picnic cooler sat beside

one chair with its lid ajar to reveal a porcelain interior.

"Things are pretty much as Uncle Jim left them. That cooler was our treasure chest because it was watertight. As you can see, there was nothing in it."

Sigrid circled the table, carefully cataloguing its contents: an uncapped bottle of India ink, a fine-nibbed drawing pen, a compass, a ruler, four brushes, a twelve by eighteen inch block of watercolor paper with the top half of the island sketched in, a set of neatly arranged watercolors and a clean tray for mixing them. Across from these, a book was opened to a reproduction of the map Robert Louis Stevenson had drawn so many years ago, and several more books formed a prop for two framed charts. Sigrid scanned the cottage and found the light oblongs on the whitewashed walls where a chart had hung on either side of the stone chimney.

"Uncle Jim often used them as references when he was drawing a new map," explained Jemima. "The right one's a copy of the survey map. It's the first one he drew after he took the job here and realized that the streams and creek made this place an island almost like the real *Treasure Island*. The other one's the first copy he made when he was in the hospital. I

guess he might've seen or done some things he didn't want to tell a kid; but when he was feeling loose, he'd talk about a treasure he brought home from England during World War II. Nothing direct, just a brief mention. If you asked too many questions, he'd cut you off. I used to think it might be gold, then again it'd sound like jewels. Whatever it was, he got it in London. He was on leave there and the building he was in was hit by a buzz bomb. Crushed his left leg.

"That London hospital was where he really got into the *Treasure Island* thing. The nurses kept bringing him different editions of the book. Because of his name, you see. He'd always had a flair for precision drawing—from the surveying—and when he started mapping the wards on scrap paper, they brought him sketch pads and pens and he was off to the races. I think they made a pet out of him because they knew his leg would never heal properly. Anyhow, he let it slip once that if the nurses hadn't liked him, he never would have recognized the treasure when it appeared."

She looked at Sigrid doubtfully through stubby sandy lashes. "That doesn't sound much like gold or diamonds, does it?"

"He never revealed its nature?"

"Nope. Anyhow, Uncle Jim knew it takes an M.S. to get anywhere in oceanography. That means an expensive year or two at some school like Duke, and I just don't have the money. In fact, I haven't been able to get up here much these last four years because I've had to work summers and part time just to stay at Vandylyn. Uncle Jim said not to worry, that he was going to give me the treasure for graduation and I could sell it for enough to finance my postgraduate work.

"When he called three weeks ago to make sure I was coming, he said he was drawing up a new map. The heart attack must have hit him within the hour. I drove up the next morning and found him slumped over the table inside. He'd just finished sketching in the outline. It was going to be our best treasure hunt."

An unembarrassed tear slipped down her freckled cheek, and she brushed it away with the back of her hand.

"The trustees for the Rawlings estate have been very understanding, but they do need the cottage for the new caretaker. Uncle Jim left everything to me, so they've asked if I can clear out his things by the end of the month. You're my

guess he kept it for sentimental reasons even though the proportions aren't quite right."

Sigrid peered through the glass at the sheet of yellowed watercolor paper, which was frayed around the edges and showed deep crease lines where it had once been folded into quarters. It, too, was minutely detailed with hillocks, trees, sailing ships, and sounding depths although, as Jemima had noted, it wasn't an accurate copy.

She turned both frames over and saw that the paper tape that sealed the backings to the frames had been torn.

"We took them apart," Jemima acknowledged. "A friend of mine came over from the rare book library at Yale to help appraise the books, and he thought maybe the treasure was an autographed letter from Stevenson or something like that which Uncle Jim might've hidden inside the matting."

"None of the books is rare?" asked Sigrid. That had seemed the most likely possibility.

"He thought they might bring a few hundred dollars if I sold them as a collection," said the girl, "but individually, nothing's worth over forty dollars at the most. And we thumbed through every one of them in case there really was a letter or something. No luck."

Sigrid's slate gray eyes swept through the large, shabby room. Something jarred, but she couldn't quite put her finger on the source.

"Not as simple as a double-croctic, is it?" Nauman asked.

Sigrid shrugged, unnettled by his light gibe. "If a treasure's here, logic will uncover it."

"But we've *been* logical!" Jemima said despairingly. "Last week my mom and I and two cousins went over every square inch of this place. We looked behind knotholes, jiggled every stone in the fireplace, checked for loose floorboards, and examined mattress seams and cushion covers. Nothing. And my cousins are home ec majors," she added to buttress her statement.

"Mom even separated out all the things Uncle Jim might have brought from England." She gestured to a small heap of books stacked atop the window case. "Luckily he dated all his books. My Yale friend says none of those is worth more than a few dollars."

Sigrid lifted one. The blue cloth binding was familiar, and when she read the publication date—1932—she realized it was the same edition of *Treasure Island* as the one her father had owned as a boy and which she had read as a child herself. Memories of lying on her stom-

ach on a window ledge, munching toasted cheese sandwiches while she read, came back to Sigrid as she paused over a well-remembered illustration of Jim Hawkins shooting Israel Hands. Inscribed on the flyleaf was *A very happy Christmas to our own Jim Hawkins from Nurse Fromyn and staff*. Underneath, a masculine hand had added 12/25/1944.

The other four books in the heap carried dates which spanned the early months of 1945. "Mom said he was brought home in the summer of '45," said Jemima, peering around Sigrid's shoulder.

"What else did he bring?"

"That first map he drew," she answered promptly, "a shaving kit, that jacket on the chair, and Mom thinks that leather portfolio, too." She fetched it in from the porch and carefully removed the charts it held before handing it over. It measured about eighteen by twenty inches.

The leather was worn by forty years of handling, but when Nauman turned it over, they could still read the tooled letters at the edge of the case. "Bartlelow's," he said. "They're still the best leather goods shop in London. And the most expensive."

Sigrid found a worn spot in

the heavy taffeta lining. Carefully, she slipped her thin fingers inside and worked the fabric away from the leather. Had any slip of paper been concealed there, her search should have found it. Nothing.

The shaving kit and threadbare pea jacket were equally barren of anything remotely resembling treasure. "My cousins thought those heavy brass buttons might be worth five dollars apiece," Jemima said ruefully. She looked around the big shabby room and sighed. "If only Uncle Jim hadn't loved secrets so much."

"If he hadn't, your childhood would have been much duller," Oscar reminded her sensibly. He knocked his pipe out on the hearth. "You promised us lunch, and I for one am ready for it. Food first, ratiocination afterwards. Lead us to your galley, Jemima Hawkins, and if it's water biscuits and whale blubber, you'll walk the plank."

"It's cold chicken and fresh salad," Jemima giggled, "but we'll have to pick the greens ourselves. Uncle Jim's garden is just down the drive."

Sigrid looked dubious and Oscar grinned. "Don't worry. I know you can't distinguish lettuce and basil from poison oak and thistles. You stay and detect; we'll pick the salad."

Left alone, Sigrid circled the room again. Although spartan in its furnishings, the area itself was so large that another thorough search was impractical. One would have to trust the home ec cousins' expertise. As a homicide detective with her own expertise, she had told Nauman that logic would uncover a treasure if it were there to be found, but perhaps she'd spoken too soon.

If there were a treasure . . .

She stared again at the forlorn table where Jemima's uncle had died so peacefully. At the drawing paraphernalia and the uncompleted map. At the empty chest on the floor, its lid ajar to receive a treasure as soon as old Jim Hawkins had mapped its burial site. She lingered over the two framed charts and a sudden thought made her measure the older one against the leather portfolio.

Jemima said this had been the very first *Treasure Island* map her uncle had attempted and that he'd kept it for sentimental reasons. But what if this were the map Robert Louis Stevenson had drawn himself? Wouldn't that be a real treasure? And what better place to hide it than in plain sight, passed off as Hawkins' own work?

She strode across the rough-planked floor and pulled two likely books from the shelves beneath the windows. One was a fairly recent biography of Stevenson, the other a facsimile copy of the first edition of *Treasure Island*. Both contained identical reproductions of the author's map, and the biography's version was labeled *Frontispiece of the first edition as drawn by RLS in his father's office in Edinburgh*.

She carried the books over to the table, but there was no denying the evidence of her eyes: the embellishments were different and the map Hawkins had brought home from London was misproportioned. The uncle's island had been drawn slightly longer and not quite as wide as Stevenson's original version.

Disappointed, Sigrid returned the books to their former slots and continued circling the room. Surely that expensive portfolio had something to do with the treasure. Or was it only a bon voyage gift from the nurses when Hawkins was shipped home?

She paused in the door of the tiny bath and inspected the battered shaving kit again. Had such a homely everyday pouch once held diamonds or gold?

Nothing about the cottage in-

licated a taste for luxury. Devising modest treasures and drawing exquisitely precise maps for his young namesake seemed to have been the caretaker's only extravagance. Otherwise, he had lived almost as a hermit, spare and ascetic, still making do with an ancient pea jacket whose eight brass buttons were probably worth more than everything else in his wardrobe.

She paused by the chair which held the jacket and again tried to make herself take each item on the table top separately and significantly.

And then she saw it.

When Jemima and Oscar reentered the cottage, hilarious with the outrageous combination of herbs and salad greens they had picked, they found Sigrid standing by the window with her finger marking a place in the blue cloth-bound book she'd read as a child. Jemima started to regale her with their collection, but Oscar took one look at Sigrid's thin face and said, "You found it."

Her wide gray eyes met his and a smile almost brushed her lips. "Can you phone your expert at Yale?" she asked Jemima.

"Sure, but he checked all the

books before. Or did you find a hidden one?"

Sigrid shook her head. "Not a book. The map." She pointed to the older of the framed charts.

"What's special about Uncle Jim's map? It's not the original, if that's what you're thinking. Charlie told me that one was auctioned off in the forties and he's pretty sure the same person still owns it."

Nauman had found a reproduction of the original and silently compared it to the faded chart on the table. "Look, Siga, the proportions are wrong."

"I know," she said, and there was definite mischief in her eyes now. "That's precisely why you should call him, Jemima."

"You mean the books are all wrong?" asked the girl.

Sigrid opened the blue book to the forward. "Listen," she said. With one hand hooked into the pocket of her jeans, she leaned against the stone chimney and read in a cool clear voice Stevenson's own version of how he came to write *Treasure Island*; of how, in that rainy August of 1881, he and his stepson "with the aid of pen and ink and shilling box of water colours," had passed their afternoon drawing.

On one of these occasions, I made a map of an island . . . the shape of it took my fancy beyond expres-

sion . . . and I ticketed it "Treasure Island" . . . the next thing I knew, I had some papers before me and was writing out a list of characters.

Sigrid turned the pages. "The next is familiar territory. The story was written, serialized in a magazine and then was to be published in book form." She read again,

I sent in my manuscript, and the map along with it . . . the proofs came, they were corrected, but I heard nothing of the map. I wrote and asked; was told it had never been received, and sat aghast. It is one thing to draw a map at random, set a scale in one corner of it . . . and write up a story to the measurements. It is quite another to have to examine a whole book, make an inventory of it, and, with a pair of compasses, painfully design a map to suit the data. I did it; and the map was drawn in my father's office . . . but somehow it was never Treasure Island to me.

Sigrid closed the book. "If you'll look closely, Jemima, you'll see the handwriting on that map's a lot closer to Stevenson's than to your uncle's."

Oscar compared the maps with an artist's eye, then lifted

the phone and wryly handed it to Jemima. "Call your friend."

It took several calls around New Haven and surrounding summer cottages to chase Jemima's expert to earth. While they waited, Oscar created an elaborate dressing for their salad and sliced the cold chicken. Lunch was spread on the porch and Sigrid was trying to decide if she really approved mixing basil and parsley together when Jemima danced through the open doorway.

"He's going to call Sotheby's in New York!" she caroled. "And he's coming out himself just to make sure; but if it's genuine, he says it'll bring thousands—enough to pay for at least two years in any M.S. program in the United States!"

Oscar removed an overlooked harlequin beetle from the salad bowl and filled Jemima's plate. "Admit it, though," he said to Sigrid. "It was the coincidence of remembering that passage from your childhood book that made you suspect the map, not logic."

"It was logic," she said firmly, forking through the salad carefully in case more beetles had been overlooked. She was not opposed to food foraged in a garden instead of in a grocery, but Nauman was entirely too casual about the wildlife.

"Show me the logic," Oscar

challenged, and Jemima looked at her expectantly, too.

"All right," said Sigrid. "Why would your uncle acquire an expensive portfolio if not to bring home something special?"

"It didn't have to be that map."

"No? What else was the right size?"

"Even so," objected Oscar, "why not assume he was taking pains with it because it was the first copy he'd drawn himself?"

"Because it's been folded. You can still see the crease lines. If he'd ever folded it up himself, why buy a leather case to carry it flat? We'll probably never know exactly how the map disappeared in the 1880's and reappeared during the Blitz, but I'd guess one of the publisher's clerks misfiled it or maybe an office boy lifted it and then was afraid to own up."

"So that it rattled around in someone's junk room until it caught a nurse or corpsman's eye and they thought it would cheer up their Yank patient? Maybe," Oscar conceded. He cocked a skeptical eye at Sigrid. "So, on the basis of some old crease marks, you instantly de-

duced this was the original Stevenson-drawn *Treasure Island* map?"

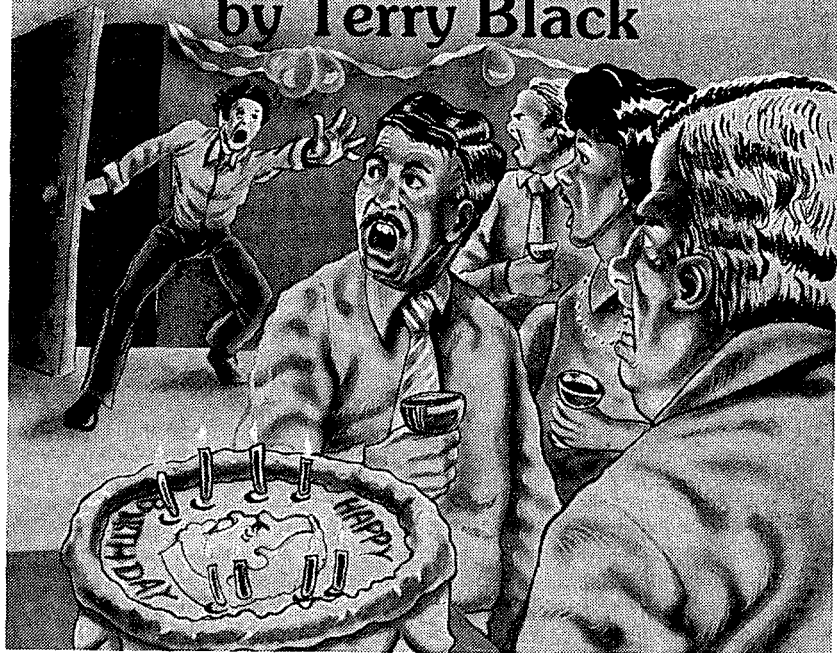
"They helped. Made it seem as if that paper hadn't been carefully handled from the beginning." She peered at a suspicious dark fleck beneath a leaf of spinach. "Too, he'd told Jemima that if it hadn't been for the nurses, he wouldn't have recognized the treasure when it appeared. Lying there in bed, he would have read the book they'd given him from cover to cover, wouldn't he? Including the foreword about the missing map? I'm sure it would have interested him because of his own mapping skills. That's really what made me look twice: the map was all wrong."

"Jemima's uncle was far too skillful to have miscopied a map with the book right there in front of him. I don't care how sentimental he might later have been over a first attempt, I couldn't see him framing and hanging a misdrawn, ill-proportioned copy."

"And *that*," she concluded triumphantly as she presented Oscar with a potato beetle done in by his dressing, "is logic."

It Ain't Necessarily So

by Terry Black



Fruitcake.

It wasn't a word Prudence often used to describe her husband—but like a pair of extra large bluejeans, it seemed to fit a little more each day.

That was why she wanted him to see Miss Krantz, not a psychiatrist but a *psychologist*; all she did was make you talk about your troubles until they didn't seem quite so bad. No muss, no fuss, no mood-shifting

compounds—just a warm, relaxed conversation, what was the harm in *that*?

Even so, it took the seven labors of Hercules to get Randall to make the appointment. And now here he was *breaking* it, he was blitzed with work, he had three feature stories due by four P.M., perhaps another time for Miss What's-Her-Name—

Prudence sensed a window closing, a chance disappearing. So she did what any half-hys-

terical spouse with a hubby going rapidly bonkers would do in her place:

She bundled Miss Krantz into a taxi, and took *her* to see *him*.

The *Daily Snoop* had its editorial offices in an ancient Gothic highrise on West 63rd, shoehorned between a parking structure and a place that sold foul-smelling submarine sandwiches.

Prudence hated the place, both in form and function. She disliked the brooding grayness of its half-century-old façade, weatherworn and studded with gargoyles; but she *really* hated the muckmongering newsrag they published there, a tabloid of such infamy it made the *National Enquirer* look like Pulitzer bait.

Unfortunately, her husband's reporting skills couldn't have found a better home.

ELVIS HAUNTS MY WALK-IN WARDROBE, screamed a laminated headline on display in the lobby. GAY-BASHING PSYCHIC CASTRATES GHOST OF LIBERACE.

"Your husband . . . *works* here?" asked Miss Krantz, gaping at the decor. She was short and prim, in a colorless wool dress; she fit into this garish lobby like a brussels sprout in a Winchell's Donut Shop.

Instead of answering, Prudence borrowed the house phone

from a yawning receptionist and stabbed four buttons.

"Randall Morton," said her husband.

"It's me, with a little surprise," Prudence explained, hoping her impertinence wouldn't land them in divorce court. "Since you couldn't get away to see Miss Krantz, well—I decided to bring her here."

"She's *here*? In this building?"

"It'll only take a minute," said Prudence. "And I *know* it'll make you feel better."

She pictured him counting to ten. On six he blurted, "Honey, I can't! I've got to do twelve column inches on Hitler's brain, then a piece on the three-headed baby and that new cholesterol diet—"

"Fifteen minutes. Time it. You'll be fresher after a break anyway."

Randall sighed. "All right, come on up. But don't dawdle—take the express elevator."

Prudence dropped the phone, grabbed Miss Krantz, and led her into the ancient and unreliable high-speed elevator. They had to share it with two cub reporters and a buck-toothed gofer, toting a trayful of hoagies. The sandwiches smelled like a maggots' nursery.

"Thirteen, please," said Prudence.

Miss Krantz winced. "I

thought they didn't have thirteen floors in buildings."

"They do in this place, lady," the gofer snorted.

After a moment, the elevator grumbled upwards, like an old man roused from sleep. Maybe it's my imagination, Prudence thought—probably it is—but I'd swear this thing is *swaying* from side to side . . .

Nonsense, she decided. I'm always overreacting, just like Randall says. He won't respect me until I learn to get a grip on things.

She glanced around, expecting to find her sudden terror unmirrored in the faces of her companions. But for the first time, Prudence's phobia was universal; *everyone* seemed panicked, especially when the elevator bucked like a bronco and lurched leftward, with a sickening *sssrape*—

And the lights went out, with a CRASH - BANG - SNAP! straight from her worst waking nightmare—

And incredibly, impossibly, no one would ever believe it but it was happening here and now, to *me*, thought Prudence, the elevator snapped its couplings and started to falllll

(this can't be right, said a tiny voice that was not her own, I can't die, I'm the person watching all this, I'm the one it all happens to, I can't die)

. . . but they *were* falling, and

when they finally hit bottom they hit **HARD**; she hoped to perish quickly but wasn't granted that privilege—

Randall Morton sat bolt upright, clawing at his temples.

It's happening again, he realized, the visions are back, worse than ever before. Jesus, they made you want to curl up and die . . .

His phone was ringing. Slowly it dawned on him that he should answer it. I have to, he thought; I have to pretend I'm normal.

"Randall Morton," he told the phone.

"It's me," said his wife, "with a little surprise. Since you couldn't get away to see Miss Krantz, well—I thought I'd bring her here."

"She's . . . here?"

"It'll only take a minute. And I'm sure it'll make you feel better."

Normally Randall would have read her the riot act: all the work he had to do, the looming deadlines, the sheer futility of seeing a shrink—

He couldn't. The vision was still too fresh, the images too horrible. "Okay," he said. "Come on up." He started to hang up, thought better of it, and added, "Don't dawdle—take the express elevator."

Prudence dropped the phone, grabbed Miss Krantz, and led her into the high-speed eleva-

tor. They had to share it with two cub reporters and a buck-toothed gofer with a trayful of hoagies.

"Thirteen, please," said Prudence.

Miss Krantz winced. "I thought they didn't have thirteenth floors in buildings."

"They do in this place, lady," the gofer snorted.

After a moment, the elevator grumbled upwards. Maybe it's my imagination, Prudence thought—probably it is—but I'd swear this thing is *swaying* from side to side . . .

Nonsense, she decided. I'm always overreacting to things, just like Randall says.

She glanced around, expecting to find her sudden terror unmirrored in the faces of her companions. And she was right, of course; the others all had that bored, elevator stare, unmoved by the mild jolting, veterans of this bumpy ride. One of the cub reporters pulled out a pack of Juicy Fruit gum.

"Thirteenth floor," said the gofer, as the doors slid open.

Prudence composed herself and led Miss Krantz through a crowded bullpen, past a rabbit warren of chattering typewriters (just like in the movies, she thought), past chain-smoking reporters and perpetually ringing telephones, to a cubicle even more cramped and squalid than its neighbors.

"Hi, honey," said Randall Morton. "Come in, sit down."

Morton's invitation was easier said than done, but Randall unearthed a chair from under a trashheap of red-lined pages and Prudence sat on his desk top.

"This is Miss Krantz," Prudence began. "She's an expert on all forms of . . . uh, unusual behavior."

Randall winced at the awkward euphemism. "No offense, Miss Krantz—but I doubt if you've ever seen anything quite like *me* before."

"Nonsense, Mr. Morton." Miss Krantz folded her perfect hands. "One benefit of therapy is to show the patient that his problems are not terribly different from—"

"Oh, I'm different," Randall broke in. "You want a frinstance? Just a moment ago I had a vision that you and my wife were killed in the elevator, coming up here. Killed horribly."

Miss Krantz hesitated. "Well . . . since that didn't happen, I guess you're not much good at foretelling the future."

"Quite the contrary," Randall shot back. His eyes twinkled with a manic gleam. "You see, I'm not like most psychics. My polarity's wrong, or something. I only see what's *not* going to happen."

"Come now, Mr. Morton—"

"I mean it! Nothing I've seen has ever come true."

"Well, what's so strange about that? Lots of people imagine things that don't take place."

Morton shook his head. "But they're right *some* of the time. With me it's different. If I predict something, you can bet your life savings *against* it. Why do you think I wanted you on that elevator? When I saw you getting pulverized, I figured it was the safest place on earth."

Miss Krantz drew a sharp breath.

"But if I have a vision that everything's fine, *then* I worry. Like last year, I had this flash about not getting my taxes audited—"

"Stop and think a moment, Mr. Morton," Miss Krantz interrupted. She leaned forward, framing her words carefully. "How many things *don't* happen every day? Cars don't explode, murders aren't committed, planes don't fall out of the sky—"

"Gorillas don't give tuba lessons. Housewives don't see the face of Jesus in their mashed potatoes. Aliens don't dine at the White House." Randall slapped the front page of the *Daily Snoop's* latest edition. "Don't you see? They're headlines, every one of 'em!"

He ran his finger down the page.

"Famed psychic's head explodes. Bigfoot monsters living on welfare. Woman gets abortion, is haunted by fetus."

"What are you saying?" asked Miss Krantz.

"I'm saying the public doesn't *want* real stories. They're too boring. They'd rather find out what *didn't* happen—and somehow, I've developed this thing in my subconscious that shows exactly that."

"So you're sort of . . . an anti-psychic?"

"Yeah. And it makes me crazy. I don't *want* to know what's not going to happen. It's none of my business."

There was an awkward silence, as the psychologist considered her next words. She was still pondering when a bearded face poked around the door-jamb.

"Hey, Morton," said the newcomer, obviously a fellow journalist, "how do you spell 'alcoholic'?"

Randall groaned. "For God's sake, Bruce, look it up."

"I haven't got a dictionary."

"Take mine."

Randall pitched him a hard-bound *Webster's*, but Bruce didn't leave. He just stood there in the hallway, thumbing pages, mouthing words. Occasionally his eyes would roll up into his head, as he considered some new lexicological insight.

"Uh . . . Bruce," Randall said

at last, "do you mind? This is kind of personal."

Bruce turned another page. "Hang on, I only need one more word. 'Venereal,' as in venereal disease."

"You're writing a celebrity profile," Randall realized.

"That's right." Bruce copied something out of the dictionary. "Who do you think the celebrity should be?"

The phone rang. Randall got it and heard his boss bellowing, "Morton! Get down here yesterday, and drag Bonzo with you."

"Yes, Mr. Cheswick." Randall turned to his wife and Miss Krantz and said, "Sorry, gang, we're wanted in surgery. See you another time."

Prudence tried to stop him, but he was already sailing past her, towing Bruce by the shirt-sleeve. She sighed helplessly.

"I guess we'll have to do this another time," she told Miss Krantz.

"That's all right," said the therapist, rising to leave. "But this time, let's take the stairs."

Chester Cheswick sat in his chair, overflowing it, drumming his blunt fingers on a tearsheet from last week's paper. He didn't look happy.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he told Bruce and Randall, fixing them with a steel-gray stare. Randall was reminded of George

S. Patton, dressing down his troops.

"I'll get right to the point," Cheswick continued, turning his gaze on Randall. "Morton, that piece on elephant zombies is the most preposterous piece of poppycock to cross my desk in twenty-five years."

"Sorry, sir . . ."

"Keep up the good work." He turned to Bruce. "Billings, you're fired."

Bruce Billings' jaw fell open. He looked like a ventriloquist's dummy left unattended. "But . . . but why?"

"Because your stories are insulting and slanderous, full of brutal slurs based on flimsy, undocumented evidence."

"I thought you *liked* that!"

"Not any more. I changed my mind when this paper was served with a ten million dollar libel suit from Burt Murphy, darling of the Superbowl and veteran of half a hundred Lite Beer commercials."

Billings swallowed hard. "I only said he *might* be gay, I didn't say he *was*."

"You, on the other hand, are definitely fired." Cheswick pressed a button and mumbled something; a big guard came in, cradling a truncheon. "Good-bye, Mr. Billings. Best of luck in another market."

"You bastard," Bruce blurted, taking a half step forward.

"You'll pay for this, you wait—"

Cheswick waited for Bruce to depart, at the guard's none-too-gentle insistence. Then he folded his hands and turned toward Randall, in a philosophical mood.

"Did you know today's my birthday, Morton? This afternoon I'll be sixty." He shook his head, as if counting the years. "You'd think I'd have learned to keep the deadbeats off the payroll."

Randall shrugged. "Can I go now, sir?"

"Poor Bruce," said Prudence, without surprise, when he told her the news that evening. "I guess his time was up."

Randall sat back in his reclining chair. "I figured it was coming. Last week I had a dream that Cheswick made him vice-president."

"You and your dreams again." Gently Prudence massaged his neck. "Are you going to call Miss Krantz?"

"I don't know," said Randall. He reached for his paper—a *real* paper, the *Times*, with honest-to-God news—and started flipping pages. "I'm still not—hey, what's *this*?"

He pointed to an article on an inside page. It read:

NEWSPAPER TYCOON NOT KILLED
WHEN BOMB FAILS TO EXPLODE

by Dennis Boyd, *Times Staff Writer*

Publishing giant Chester Cheswick was not declared dead on arrival today at County General Hospital, after a bomb failed to explode in his face at precisely 4:00 P.M.

Non-grieving relatives expressed no regrets, and made no plans for a funeral this coming Saturday.

"Well, that's peculiar," said Prudence, frowning. "Why make such a fuss over something that *didn't* happen?"

"They wouldn't," Randall realized, his eyebrows rising. "Unless... unless... *oh my God—*"

Randall Morton sat bolt upright, clawing at his temples.

It had happened again, he knew instantly. It was all another dream—but a frighteningly *specific* one. If his vision was right (or, rather, if it was wrong) then his boss would be blown to bits at precisely four, P.M.

He checked his watch. Three forty-nine, and counting.

For a moment he sat paralyzed. Should he evacuate the building? Run like hell and save himself? How could he explain that everyone was in dan-

ger because he'd seen the future, and it looked *fine*?

Call him. Call Cheswick.

Randall fumbled with the phone, managed to hunt-and-peck the right extension, and listened for eight agonizing rings before he concluded that the boss and his secretary were elsewhere.

But where?

He bolted out of his seat, his deadlines forgotten, and sprinted down the hall. He turned a corner and broadsided a secretary, sending a stack of papers and two cups of cream-and-sugar coffee flying.

"Where's Cheswick?" he blurted. "I've got to see him—"

"The only thing *you're* going to see is a severance check," snapped the secretary, dabbing futilely at the stains on her blouse, "if you ever—"

But Randall was already past her, zigzagging down the corridor toward the glass-fronted office labeled CHESTER CHESWICK, PUBLISHER.

He burst in, saw no one (what did you *expect*? he thought) and found nothing, not a clue, not a memo, not a hastily scribbled hint as to where the newspaper magnate might be facing his doom.

"Where's Cheswick?" he cried, buttonholing a copyboy. But all he got was a puzzled frown.

He checked his watch. Three fifty-one—no, three fifty-two, it

changed as he looked at it.

Where *was* the old idiot?

Suddenly Randall had an inspiration. He backtracked, found the door marked MEN'S ROOM and flung himself inside. But Cheswick was nowhere to be seen; the only occupant was Bruce Billings, wiping his hands on a paper towel.

"What's the problem?" asked Bruce, seeing Morton's crazed expression.

Randall could contain himself no longer. "A bomb is gonna blow up and kill Mr. Cheswick in less than eight minutes! *That's* my problem!"

He expected disbelief. But instead of skepticism, Bruce got angry.

"Dammit," he snapped, "how did *you* find out?"

Randall started to explain, then did a double-take. "Wait a minute," he demanded. "How come you believe me, when nobody else does?"

Bruce didn't answer. Instead he sprang for the door. Randall made a grab but got only a handful of shirt, it tore away and Billings was free—

—just as the door swung inward right into Billings' face, *thwacking* him between the eyes. Bruce went down like a condemned building, out cold.

"Excuse me," said a junior somebody, poking round the door.

Randall grabbed Bruce by his

shirt front, trying to hoist him back up into consciousness. Bruce had planted the bomb; he wanted revenge for getting bounced, and he was going to get it in about ninety seconds—

"Where's the bomb?" Randall asked hopelessly.

But Bruce was past caring. Morton let go and the would-be killer's head hit the floor.

That's when Randall heard it.

It was soft, muffled, barely audible; he might never have noticed if his senses hadn't been sharpened to pin-drop sensitivity by the force of desperation. But he *did* hear it: the unmistakable strains of *Happy Birthday*, coming from the lunchroom.

He almost made it.

Randall raced through the *Daily Snoop* building with impossible speed; he stole only one glance at his wristwatch, long enough to realize he was down to seconds now: 3:59:42, 3:59:43—

(What if the bomb isn't synchronized to your watch, what if it's off just a little, maybe a little bit early?)

He burst into the lunchroom on the line, "Happy *Birthday*, dear Chester . . ." to find Chester Cheswick surrounded by his best-loved employees, posed beside a magnificent layer cake, with a buttercream likeness of

Cheswick's craggy features—

The bomb was in the cake. Randall *knew* it somehow. He could have proved it, if only he'd had time to reach through the gobby frosting and pull it out in time to disarm it.

But he didn't.

The bomb went off when he was halfway there. Cheswick died instantly, Randall a moment later, and everyone else in the crowded lunchroom either right away or soon thereafter, of multiple burns, contusions, and trauma.

The *Daily Snoop* did not go out of business, however; in the aftermath of Cheswick's demise it was swallowed up by Rupert Murdoch, who saw its circulation and sales climb forty percent over the next three years.

Prudence got a check from the insurance company, a big check, but it was some time before she could bring herself to cash it—

Randall Morton gasped, clawing at his temples.

It had happened again, yet again, there was no end to these damned visions. But now that it was over, where was he, and *when* was he . . . ?

"Morton!" growled Cheswick, in his most ferocious baritone. "What are you doing here?"

Randall opened his eyes.

He was standing in the lunchroom. Chester Cheswick

was surrounded by his best-loved employees, posed beside a magnificent layer cake, with a buttercream likeness of Cheswick's craggy features.

Randall's watch read four o'clock exactly.

He pounced. He plunged both hands into the gobby frosting, obliterating Chester's profile, snowplowing the sugary mess between his fingers until he found it, clutched it, yanked it free: four sticks of dynamite and a detonator, wired to an egg timer.

He pulled the wires free. The timer went *bzzzzzzt!* but nothing else happened.

For a moment, no one said anything.

Then Cheswick goggled and cried, "My God, that's a *bomb!* Someone tried to blow me up!"

"Bruce Billings," said Randall, feeling suddenly very tired. "You'll find him in the men's room. Take some aspirin and an ice bucket."

Randall didn't expect his wife to believe it all, but she did—after it showed up on the evening news. Over dinner he tried to fill in the details.

"Don't you see?" he asked, through a forkful of meatloaf. "When I finally dreamed I *couldn't* stop the bomb, that meant I *could*. And not a

moment too soon."

Prudence toyed with her stringbeans. "Was Cheswick grateful?"

"Are you kidding? He's a new man! He didn't even make me pay for his birthday cake."

Prudence pushed her plate away, with an air of resignation. "So what's next?" she asked, not wanting to hear his answer. "Are you going to join the circus? Use your powers for the good of mankind?"

Randall smiled—a good smile, warm and confident. "I don't *have* any powers. Not any more."

Prudence frowned.

"I'm cured," he insisted. "It's gone. Whatever gave me those crazy dreams is out of my head, forever. Don't ask me how I know. I just . . . *feel* it, somehow." He took a final bite of meatloaf. "From now on, my life's going to be perfectly, wonderfully *boring*."

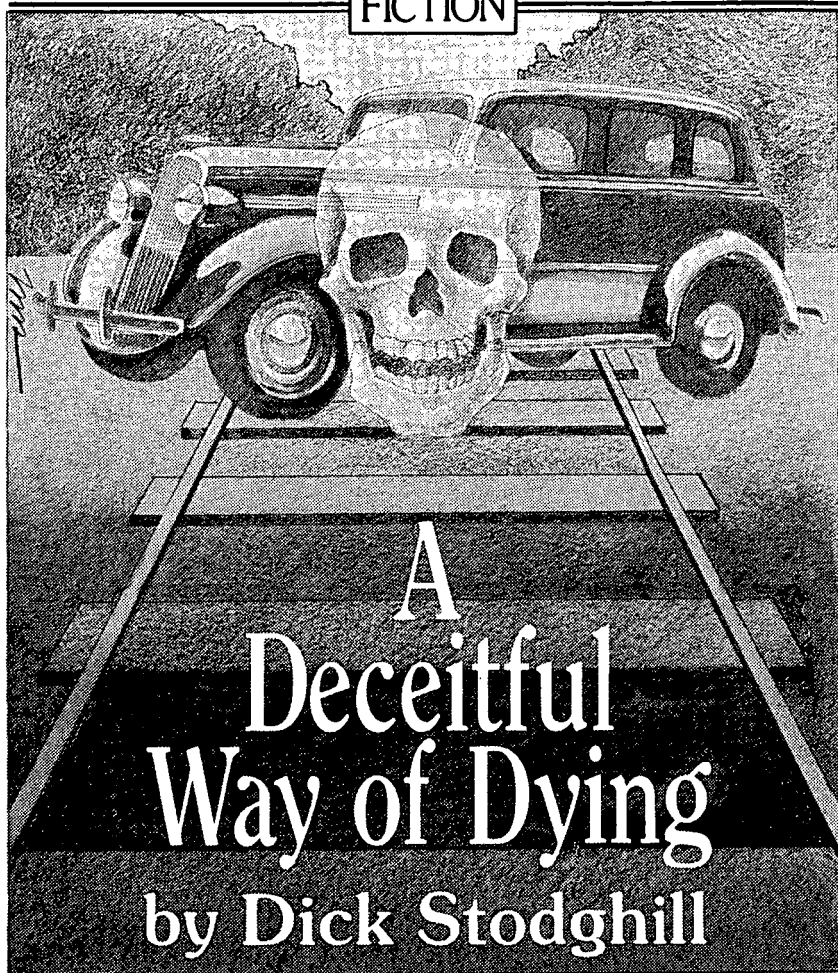
And in spite of herself, without quite knowing if she believed him or not, Prudence took his hand. She smiled—

Randall Morton sat bolt upright, clawing at his temples.

Prudence was watching him curiously; on the plate before him was a half-eaten serving of meatloaf.

He thought, *here we go again—*

FICTION



“**H**ow many times can one man die?” Jack Eddy was not expecting an answer, of course. Even so I turned away, staring off toward East Akron Cemetery. Len Morgan had been

buried there five months earlier, or so they had said at the time. Now we knew better.

Jack paced the front porch of the boarding house on Dudley Street, at every step the black grit from the tall stacks at

Goodyear crunching underfoot. The sound sent shivers along my spine. But it meant men were working, and that was something to be thankful for in the summer of 1937.

"To begin with," he said, "we have to find out who they buried in Morgan's place."

"You."

"What?"

"You have to find out," I told him. "The insurance company hired the Wellington Agency to sort this out, not the *Times-Press*."

He laughed, or perhaps it was only a terse, scoffing exclamation. "Yeah, sure. And when I have the answers, pal, I suppose I can turn the story over to the *Beacon Journal* and you won't raise a peep."

"You wouldn't do that."

"Don't bank on it. Look, buddy, let's compare notes, go over everything from the beginning. This Morgan, he was a high roller in Akron, right? All the big shots knew him. So how come nobody got wise to the fact that it wasn't him they were burying?"

"You read my story. The train hit Morgan's car dead-center on the driver's door. This was a B&O express, Jack. I mean there wasn't enough left of him to fill a grocery sack."

"One thing didn't show up in your story. Who identified the body, and how?"

"His wife. She knew his argyll socks."

"That was it?"

"You're forgetting that back in January there wasn't any reason to doubt it was Len Morgan. A mess like that to deal with, who's going to snoop around or ask questions?"

"Your story said the car stalled on the tracks. Is that what the engineer told you?"

"Right. Well, he said they came around the curve and the car was sitting there fifty yards away. It was a lonely crossing, no lights or gates, so he figured Morgan started across, then heard the whistle and panicked. That's how he stalled the motor."

"Then the engineer never saw the car moving? That means somebody could have parked it on the tracks. And let's quit calling the guy that was in it Morgan. Morgan turned up dead in Ashtabula three days ago, so let's call the man in the car Mr. X."

"Mr. X is one of the wrestlers down at the Akron Armory. He wears a red suit and a mask."

"You mean you go down there and watch those phonies? I figured you for having better sense. So call him whatever you like — except Morgan."

I shook my head, bewildered by the affair. "This one's too much for me, Jack. A John Doe is killed in Morgan's car and

everybody assumes it's Morgan. At the same time Morgan disappears for five months. Then somebody shoots Morgan in Ashtabula and leaves the body without any identification. If he hadn't worked a government job six years ago so his fingerprints were on file with the FBI he would have been a second John Doe."

"Now you've got it, buddy. Except one thing—if the *real* Morgan went into the books as a John Doe, then everybody would have gone on believing it was Morgan lying under that headstone in the cemetery down the street. And that was the mistake somebody made, forgetting about that government job or not knowing it meant having his fingerprints on record."

"So how did this 'somebody' get Morgan to disappear the night he was supposed to have been killed by the train? And why did your 'somebody' wait five months to really kill him?"

Jack punched me lightly on the arm. "Ask me this time tomorrow, buddy, and I'll probably have some answers. One thing for sure, no one had to get Morgan to do anything at the beginning because he was in on the act. He had to have been. And unless I miss my guess, finding *all* the answers isn't going to be as tough as you expect."

"So you think it was for the insurance money? I mean parking somebody in front of that train."

"Why else?"

"Then that means his wife had to be in on it, too."

"Probably. We can't be sure yet."

"She was the beneficiary."

"Right, but that doesn't prove anything. Don't get me wrong, though, she probably was involved."

"Fifty thousand bucks, that's a lot of dough."

"For you, maybe. Not for somebody living in a big house out on Portage Path. The fact is, the insurance company thought a twenty-five thousand, double indemnity policy wasn't much for somebody in Morgan's position. Until he turned up dead the second time, that is."

"Why did they hire you? Either way they have to pay off, don't they?"

"Not if it turns out the beneficiary killed him, they don't. You can't profit by your own crime. The thing is, they already have paid off. Now they're thinking about getting their fifty grand back."

After dinner Jack and Kitty Bauer left for the double feature at the Rialto on Goodyear Boulevard. The pictures didn't sound like Jack's kind of enter-

tainment: Burns and Allen in *Here Comes Cookie* and Joan Blondell in *King and the Chorus Girl*. The fair Kitty, daughter of our landlady, must have talked him into going. They had been running around together ever since Jack had arrived on the scene—as usual, I had waited too long to express my feelings. Now Kitty would never know.

I decided to walk down to the Lenox Cafe around the corner on Market Street. It was a warm evening so the door was open, and you could hear the machinery humming across the street at Goodyear Plant One.

For awhile I mulled it over again, the way that in the two months he had been in town Jack Eddy had changed my life. And Kitty Bauer's life. Why had an assistant manager at the Akron branch of Wellington's National Detective Agency chosen Ivy Bauer's boarding house on remote Dudley Street as a place to live? Because he had, I had picked up some good stories for the *Times-Press*. But Jack Eddy was a driven man, a man obsessed by a need to rise to the top. He had chosen me to tag along at his side, to ride his coattails. I was smart enough to know it had nothing to do with a desire for companionship. A reporter on the police beat made a good contact for him, could introduce him to the

right people, guide him around until he came to know the town, that was all. Trying to keep pace with him, even though I did so reluctantly, was a challenge. But I had no choice; a reporter couldn't let a man in his own house feed stories to the opposition. Not if he wanted to hold onto his job.

My thoughts turned to Len Morgan, a free-wheeling building contractor who had a way of coming up with choice jobs even during the Great Depression. Why would a man like that pull some sort of con job on an insurance company for fifty thousand dollars? At thirty dollars a week it would take most of my working life for me to earn that amount, but to the Len Morgans of the world it wasn't much if it meant chucking everything he had in order to get it. And that's what it *did* mean because he couldn't reappear from the dead. Ironically, he *had* reappeared from the dead, but as a dead man.

The next day Jack Eddy came striding into the city room soon after first edition deadline. Even before that, my mood had been sour. Little of interest had been happening on my beat or anywhere else in town. The world and national news coming in on the wire was equally boring or else depressing. Franklin De-

lano Roosevelt, Jr., had married Ethel du Pont. So who cared? The Russians and Japanese were on the verge of war over the Amur River islands, which no one in Akron had ever heard of. The Fat Nazi Herman Goering was demanding the return of the colonies taken from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Across the state line in New Castle, Pennsylvania, an eleven-year-old boy had been convicted of first degree murder. The violence that had accompanied the steel strike for weeks continued in Johnstown, Beaver Falls, Youngstown, Canton, Massillon. The death toll had reached twelve, and that didn't include the ten killed by the Chicago police on Memorial Day. The latest report revealed that seven of the ten had been shot in the back. And for a capper it was raining in Cleveland and the Indians' game with the St. Louis Browns was washed out.

What a day, and now Jack Eddy had turned up. Eight weeks earlier no one had known him, and resented his walking in like he owned the place. Now, thanks to several headline cases he'd solved, even city editor Ben Goldsmith treated him like a celebrity. I was the least thrilled of all to see him.

He sat on a corner of my desk, swinging one leg, smiling down at me in that cocky way he had.

"Finished your stories, buddy?" I nodded so he said, "Come on, let's take a drive to Ashtabula."

"I've got work to do until the final edition's out. You know that."

Jack turned to where Goldsmith was reading copy. "We're checking out this Len Morgan story, Ben. Can somebody else handle the police stuff this afternoon?"

He really knew how to manipulate people. Story, he had said, not case.

Goldsmith nodded as if it were a reasonable request. "Sure. Go ahead, Bram." He looked over at the new cub reporter. "Kid, you check Geary's beat this afternoon."

So we were off to Ashtabula under a gray sky that had been spitting rain intermittently since dawn. Traffic was light as we drove north until we were out of the city and suburbs, heading east through gently-rolling farm country. The eight cylinders under the hood of Jack's Auburn sedan purred quietly when he held it at sixty-five along the road to Kent. My Chevy, a 1932 model like the Auburn, could have cruised at sixty-five but people would have heard it coming. When Jack slowed down at the outskirts of Ravenna, I turned to face him. "I thought you said the first thing to do was identify the man killed by the train."

"The man everybody *thought* was killed by the train. Ten to one he was already dead. Unconscious, at least. Anyway, that's one of the things we're going to check, buddy. The way I see it, if Morgan picked Ashtabula for hiding out after that, maybe he had prepared a second identity there ahead of time. If that's the case, he might have found a victim the right age and size while he was hanging around the bars."

"How do you know that's what he was doing?"

"Where else would you look for a derelict? And being as well-known as he was, Morgan wouldn't check into the best hotel in town or show up where people might know him."

"I can't see him picking a place only eighty miles from Akron for a hideout, Jack. Just because his body turned up in Ashtabula doesn't mean he was living there."

"You're right, but I have a hunch he was. He wouldn't have wanted to stray too far from home, not if he still had loose ends to tie up. The photos I've seen of him, Morgan was an average looking guy with no distinctive features. By adding a few—eyeglasses, a mustache, cheek-fatteners—he probably could have fooled most people."

"If that's what he did, I think he would have gone to Cleve-

land. It's easier to lose yourself in a big city."

"Morgan would have known half the businessmen there. And if he was going to spend time in cheap bars, Cleveland isn't the place to do it these days."

"I don't get . . . oh, you mean the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run? Eight victims since September of '35 and not a one of them identified. You're saying Morgan wouldn't have wanted to take a chance on being number nine."

"More likely he wouldn't have wanted to hang out where the cops are giving everybody the once-over like they are in Cleveland these days. But I'll bet Morgan got the idea of picking up derelicts from reading about the Butcher. You know, befriend a down-and-outer until you gain his confidence and get to know his background. That has to be what this maniac is doing to kill that many people and not have a single person miss even one of them."

"Maybe Morgan was the Mad Butcher."

Jack gave a terse laugh. "I checked his background this morning and he didn't study anatomy. To make the cuts he does, the guy at Kingsbury Run has to be a doctor, a medical student, a veterinarian, a real butcher. Maybe a worker at one of the packing houses, which

amounts to the same thing. You can bet that's where Morgan got the idea of finding a derelict, then killing him after making sure that no one could identify him and that no one would start asking questions about what happened to somebody his age and size."

The first thing we discovered at Ashtabula was that Morgan had grown a mustache, was wearing a toupee, and had an eyeglass case in his pocket. The glasses weren't found with the body. The police had learned he had been using the name Luke Myers and lived in a three room flat above a store in the part of town called Ashtabula Harbor. After looking over the apartment, they concluded he had been shot there; then the body was stripped of identification and dumped in a desolate area east of town near Lake Erie.

Little of a personal nature had been found in the furnished flat, and most of it was in a suitcase by the door. A few articles of clothing, the usual toilet articles, a cheap Philco table-model radio, some magazines, two railroad tickets to El Paso, Texas. The police were as bewildered by the tickets as I was, but Jack passed them off with a shrug.

And he had been right; Morgan had spent a lot of time in

rowdy taverns frequented by sailors off the ore boats and lake freighters. Iron ore from Duluth bound for Pittsburgh and Youngstown was unloaded at Ashtabula, coal and steel went back the other way. Along the busy waterfront a stranger wouldn't attract attention unless he was of a mind to seek it out.

When Jack drove north from downtown and parked in front of a bar on the harbor's narrow and dreary main street I gave him a questioning look. "What's the point, Jack? We already know this is where Morgan put in his time."

He didn't reply, just motioned with his head for me to follow him inside. Jack didn't identify himself, but he had the bearing of a cop so the bartender took it for granted that's what he was. Jack showed him a picture of Morgan as he had looked without a mustache, hairpiece, glasses, and anything else he might have used to change his appearance. I noticed it was a photo from the *Times-Press* files, which meant Jack was conning one of the girls in the newspaper's morgue. I never was able to understand what it was about him that appealed to women.

The fat man behind the bar studied the photo a moment, started to hand it back, then

took a second look before shaking his head. "Naw, I don't know the guy. For a minute there I thought he looked like somebody I might of seen, but hell, man, guys wander in and out all the time."

Jack showed the picture to a couple of hard cases, obviously sailors, seated at a table. They shook their heads.

Out on the street I said, "For crying out loud, Jack, of course the bartender thought he looked a little familiar. If you drew glasses and a mustache on that photo he would've known Morgan right away."

As he was opening the door of the next bar down the street Jack said, "That's not what I'm interested in."

The result was the same, but at the third tavern the bartender was a young fellow, sharper than the other two. After a quick glance at the picture he said, "Looks like a guy that used to come in all the time. I mean it looks like he would have looked in a suit and tie and without a few years of boozing behind him."

Jack said, "When did he quit coming in?"

"Few months ago. Around the first of the year, I guess. I mean who keeps track?"

"This guy, did he have a name?"

The young fellow laughed. "Who asks names? People called

him Shakey, that's all."

A man drinking Iron City from a bottle leaned closer and took a look, then gave a low whistle. "That could be Shakey, all right. But, man, somebody sure cleaned him up since the last time I laid eyes on him."

"When was that?"

"Like Frankie said, four, maybe five months ago."

"What else do you know about him? Name? Where he came from?"

"Nothing. Guys like that, they come and go. One day they're gone but you don't even notice. Unless somebody like you comes along and asks questions, then maybe you remember."

Jack looked back at Frankie the bartender. "That guy they found shot the other day, did he used to come in?"

"Sure, every day."

"Since when?"

"I don't know. Last winter sometime, I guess."

"Early December," the second man said. "I remember because the first time I seen him we was talking about the lake starting to freeze up earlier than normal. He told me he was off one of the boats but I didn't believe him."

"Why not?"

"He didn't have the look."

Jack stepped on the gas all the way back to Akron so we arrived just in time for supper.

I didn't say anything, but that amused me. Tough, cocksure Jack Eddy was intimidated by Ivy Bauer's warning against missing an evening meal without letting her know well ahead of time.

He had said little during the ride and only grunted when I asked him what he thought about the pair of railroad tickets in Morgan's room. He hurried through supper and pushed his chair back saying, "Come on, Bram, we're wasting time," just as Mrs. Bauer carried a fresh-from-the-oven apple pie in from the kitchen.

"Just sit right back down there," she told him. "Nothing is so important that you can't finish a meal."

Jack sat down, then grinned when he saw me smirking. After finishing his pie he leaned back contentedly and complimented Mrs. Bauer. Still I could see he was impatient to leave, so I gulped my coffee and followed him out the front door and down the street to the Auburn. We were rolling before I had the door closed behind me. As Jack turned the corner onto Willard Street I said, "Don't forget I have to pick up my car downtown."

"Later. Right now we're going to talk to the widow."

"Do you think the second train ticket was for her?"

He cast a glance in my direc-

tion, one that told me to stop asking dumb questions. The rest of the ride across town to Portage Path was completed in silence. We parked in the driveway beside a two story brick house that was impressive even though it wasn't in the same class with those of the rubber company executives living in the neighborhood. On the way to the door Jack said, "Let me do the talking," as if it were something I didn't always do.

A maid left us standing on the doorstep while she went to ask if Mrs. Morgan would see us. She would, so we followed the maid down a hallway and into a lavishly furnished room half the size of Ivy Bauer's entire first floor. Our surroundings went unnoticed from then on because Hazel Morgan had arisen to greet us and she was a strikingly beautiful woman. I guessed her age at forty-five, but she was the type that improves with the years.

I'm not certain what I had expected, probably a hard-bitten, stone-cold murderess. Instead she was gracious and warm, a woman so obviously sensitive to the feelings of those in her presence that she managed to make me forget how out of place I felt in my twenty dollar suit and scuffed shoes. Even Jack Eddy seemed impressed by her.

Everything about Hazel Mor-

gan spoke of money and a cultured background. She answered Jack's questions in a voice as smooth and soft as velvet. If she was evasive in doing so she was an excellent actress. After a moment or two I was ready to believe she was as confused by the events in her life as I was, almost as if all this had happened to someone else and in a world beyond anything past experience enabled her to relate to even remotely.

It wasn't until Jack asked about the insurance money that her composure seemed to desert her, and then only for an instant. She chewed her lower lip, glancing toward me and then back to Jack again before saying, "I don't know what to do about it. No one's contacted me until now. I received a check a few weeks after my husband ... after that other man was killed in the accident, but now I just don't know. Do you want it back?"

"That's not my department," Jack said.

Tears welled up in her eyes but she blinked them away. "My lawyer called yesterday. He said the double indemnity clause was still effective. I don't know about things like that and have to take his word for it."

"You still have the money?"

Her eyes flickered momentarily. "Yes, of course." For the

first time I wondered if she was being candid.

We left soon after that. As I was opening the door of the Auburn, a young woman of twenty or so walked around the corner from the rear of the house. She came straight toward us, stopping when she was a few feet from Jack. He had seen her, too, and was waiting beside the car.

"I'm Marcia Morgan," she told him. Her belligerent tone led me to believe she usually went around with a chip on her shoulder. "My mother wasn't completely frank with you. That's your own fault because you didn't ask the right questions."

"Such as?"

She was plain, almost coarse in appearance and attitude, nothing at all like her mother. I had an idea she was the kind who opened other people's mail and used an extension phone to snoop on conversations. She said, "You didn't ask if my father wanted a divorce. You didn't ask if he was running around behind her back."

"I take it he was?"

"You catch on fast. He had been slipping around with some tramp for months before he staged his vanishing act. Mother is so naive, she didn't suspect a thing until I gave her the low-down."

"He wanted a divorce but your mother wouldn't go along?"

"As well as being naive, she's dumb as a cow. She said it was just a passing fancy and he'd get over it. Can you imagine keeping a man around when he was chasing after some slut? If she'd had any sense, Mother could have taken him for everything he had. Instead she went along with it and then when she thought he was dead she fell for some cock and bull story and handed her insurance money over to Harry Swift."

"Your father's partner? How do you know all this?"

"I'm not stupid, you know. I have ears." Marcia Morgan switched to a syrupy tone intended to mimic her mother: "She said, 'It was what your dad would have wanted. The business is in trouble and has to be saved.'" She gave a scornful laugh. "Then a month ago she found out it not only was a big lie but their partnership agreement had a clause saying that if one partner died the other got the entire business."

"You're saying your mother's broke?"

After another mirthless laugh she said, "Don't worry about her. She has her own money, you know. More than she knows what to do with. That's probably the only reason my father married her, but then he found out she wouldn't part with any of it."

Jack, as good at role playing

as he was, hadn't been able to keep the distaste he felt for Marcia Morgan from showing on his face. Now he said, "How much of what you're saying is fact and how much was dreamed up by a dirty mind?"

She glared at him a moment, flushing in a way that turned her face an unsightly, mottled crimson, then whirled and stalked off the way she had come. Over her shoulder she called, "I should have known better than to waste my time talking to an insurance company flunky and his slack-jawed lackey."

After watching her leave, Jack got in the Auburn so I did the same. Then he turned to me and burst out laughing. "Let's go get your car, you slack-jawed lackey."

I smiled a little, which was more than it deserved.

But rather than going downtown to my car, Jack pulled over near a phone booth at the Highland Square business district along the way. A movie had just ended; the sidewalk was busy with people with nowhere to go but home, and in no hurry to get there. Jack said, "Just a sec," and went to the phone, brushing a few strollers aside in his haste.

When he returned he said, "Okay, buddy, how do we get to Chestnut Boulevard?"

"That's north of town in Cuy-

ahoga Falls. Go back the way we came and we'll go down through the valley." I checked my watch. "Why are we going there? It's getting late, almost half past eight."

"It wouldn't be late if you didn't have to get to work at such an ungodly hour. We're going to see Harry Swift. He isn't thrilled about it, but he didn't have any choice when I told him it was about the insurance money."

The brown Auburn was pushing seventy when we got to the bottom of a long winding hill. I held on as we made a screeching left turn and started the climb up the rough red bricks of Uhler Street. "Take it easy," I said. "I thought you were going to roll this buggy back there."

Jack laughed. "We didn't come close."

As we approached Chestnut Boulevard I said, "That big brick building on the corner is Semler's Tavern. A few months ago the LaFatch gang raided the place and smashed up the Walbridge Club inside."

"How come?"

"It's a gambling joint. They said a big-shot Akron gambler hired them to do it. Five of the gang got sent up a few weeks ago. You must have read about it in the papers."

While we waited for the traffic light to change Jack studied the

place, storing the information in his head. Once it was there, no detail would be forgotten. When we were moving again he said, "The house is on your side of the street," so I began checking numbers that were hard to make out in the last of the twilight. The house, when we found it, was big, but not as big as Len Morgan's. A for-sale sign was in the front yard. Jack said, "Want to bet he's got his eye on something more impressive for a man moving up in the world?"

Harry Swift opened the front door for us. He was about my height, six three, but he had a small head and a large mustache that emphasized his ferret-like face rather than camouflaging it as he probably hoped. He led us to a small room, a study or office, then closed the door behind him. Jack and I sat in leather armchairs, Swift went to the one behind his desk. Jack didn't like the arrangement so he got up and stood in front of a gas fireplace, one elbow resting on the mantel.

"What's this all about?" Swift asked. At best his scratchy voice wouldn't have made pleasant listening, and now it held a sharp edge that made me think he was nervous.

Jack said, "A few questions, that's all. My firm, Selma Life and Casualty, is interested in knowing why Hazel Morgan

turned her husband's insurance money over to you. What's the story?"

Swift was taken by surprise. Before answering he did a lot of blinking and cleared his throat several times. Then he replied with another question: "Who told you that?"

"Come on, Swift, let's not waste time playing games. When she did it, did she know your partnership agreement with her husband left her out in the cold?"

"Are you implying that I'd cheat her?"

"Look, Swift, the company wants to know the story, so lay off the questions and let's hear it."

Harry Swift wasn't the kind that is easily intimidated. He would have been more at home doing the intimidating. In a poker game he would have bluffed his way; if that didn't work he would have gone to blustering. He stood up abruptly, putting him on equal footing with Jack. "I don't have to tell you a damn thing, fella. Who do you think you are, coming in here trying to throw your weight around? I tried to be nice about it, but now I wouldn't give you the time of day."

He walked to the door and flung it open. "On your way, boys. And for the sake of your health, don't show up around here again."

"Play it your way, pal," Jack told him on the way out. "But you can count on us being back."

At the front door, just on a hunch and because I didn't like Swift even a little, I turned and looked back. "Were you the middle man, Swift? Did you just pass the fifty grand on to Len Morgan without anyone being the wiser?"

He slammed the door behind us.

As Jack backed out of the driveway he said, "Where'd you come up with that idea, Bram? I was thinking along a different line, but I like yours better."

I hadn't meant it seriously, but wasn't about to let Jack know that. "It seems kind of obvious, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, it does, once you think about it. You know, buddy, this hasn't been one of my good days. I goofed up back there with that Morgan dame, too. The daughter, I mean. I should have led her on, got her to tell us more about this other woman. For all I know she might even have come up with a name."

"I was wondering why you handled it the way you did."

Jack darted an icy glance my way. "Look, I'm going to see her again tomorrow. Soft soap her a little, make out like nothing happened. I'll pick you up again about noon."

"I'm off tomorrow. Compensatory time for working last

Sunday. The Indians are playing, so I'm planning to go up."

"Forget it, this is no time to have your mind on games. She's probably a late sleeper so we'll go out about ten since you're not working. We might just as well leave your car where it is tonight and get it in the morning."

"Drive downtown, Jack. I want my car *now*."

At breakfast, a meal I rarely had the privilege of eating at the boarding house except on Sunday, Artie Bauer said, "Are you still gonna go up to the game in Cleveland, Bram? Boy, I sure wish I could go up and see one sometime."

I looked at the eleven-year-old, the youngest of Bus and Ivy Bauer's three children. A full day in Artie's company would tax my good nature to the limit. But an idea leaped to mind. "I guess not, Artie. But maybe you and Kitty could go up with me on Sunday."

Kitty's head shook emphatically. "I hate baseball. Besides, I have other plans."

"I don't," said Artie.

"Well, we'll see," I told him.

Jack had said to meet him at his office in the Metropolitan Building on Main Street at nine forty-five, but he called the house a little before nine and asked for me. When I picked up

the phone he said, "Come on right down, buddy. I called and gave Marcia the old song and dance routine and she lapped it up. We're meeting her in the tea room at Polsky's as soon as it opens. In the meantime I'll fill you in on what I dug up on the Morgan-Swift Construction outfit."

I walked down to Market Street under a sky as dull as my mood and caught a boxy orange bus trailing a cloud of diesel fumes that made Akron's rubber factories smell like roses by comparison. When I walked into his office, Jack was scowling. "Where've you been? What kept you?"

"I rode the bus."

"The *bus*? Why would you do a thing like that?"

"Because gasoline costs money and I'm not on a Wellington's expense account. What did you find out about Morgan-Swift?"

"They've been in sound financial shape for years. If Morgan told his wife otherwise it was a lie. Come on, we have to get down to Polsky's."

As we walked south on Main Street toward the department store I was wondering why he had wanted me to come down early just so he could tell me something so trivial. To make sure I didn't sneak off to Cleveland, I decided.

Lipstick, rouge, and a flashy pink dress didn't help Marcia

Morgan look a bit better than the previous evening. She had pulled in her horns, though, seeming almost pleasant as Jack laid on the sweet talk. It amazed me the way women fell under his spell. It wasn't because of his looks; at twenty-five his brown hair was already growing thin and his smile had a way of disappearing before it had time to register.

When I had reached the point of being ready to gag, he finally got down to business. "If we knew her name," he said, "we just might be able to make it hot for your father's girlfriend. Any idea what it is?"

"Tillie. Isn't that about what you'd expect for a woman like that? I heard him call her that on the phone one day, but he said, 'Tillie, honey.' I could hardly keep from laughing out loud."

"No last name?"

She took a small book from her purse. "No, but I'm sure it starts with the letter U. Those initials keep showing up in my father's appointment book." She held it toward Jack, pointing to an entry. "See, here it is. MTU 10. I figured it out and that means meet Tillie at ten o'clock."

I was thinking that if that was all he had to go on Jack could spend years hunting for the right Tillie, Matilda, or whatever her real name happened to be. Then Marcia said,

"And I cross checked his business schedule at the office. Every time MTU is in this book he spent the day in Erie."

"Erie, Pennsylvania? What was he doing there?"

"The company built a small office building there last year. They started in June and finished in November. That must have been when he met her."

"Did your father go there a lot?"

"Every week. Sometimes for two or three days. One day last fall I heard Harry Swift complaining that he was spending a lot of time there for so small a project."

"Anything else of interest in that book?"

"Not that I discovered." She handed it to him. "Here, you can keep it until you've finished your job, then I want it back."

"You'll get it, kiddo. Thanks a lot. One more thing, did your dad and Harry Swift get along well together?"

"As well as any two hustlers can get along with each other, I suppose."

As Jack and I walked through the store on our way to the street I said, "Erie's only about forty miles the other side of Ashtabula. I guess that explains why Morgan picked it as his hideout. You know, so he would be close to the woman."

"It explains a lot of things, buddy. For one, those railroad

tickets." He stopped beside a bank of phone booths, then borrowed a nickel. A couple of minutes later he stepped out, saying, "No luck. No one connected with that project in Erie had a last name beginning with U. Come on, let's get going."

"Where to now? I could still make that ball game."

For an instant the irritation he felt showed on Jack's face. "Don't you ever think about anything but baseball? We'll have more fun in Erie."

He was already on his way toward the door again. I watched for a second or so, then sighed and followed along. When we got to the street a misty rain was falling, but Jack didn't seem to notice. I turned up the collar of my suit coat, thinking it was a miserable day for a long drive. Or a ball game. When Jack suddenly became aware of the rain he turned and gave my arm a punch, pulling it a little but not enough so it didn't sting. "See, buddy, the game's going to be rained out, so you would have wasted your whole day."

I had dozed off, but came awake fast when the brakes squealed and I felt myself heading for the windshield. Jack's arm held me back before I hit it. He said, "Damn fool, doesn't he believe in stop signs?"

I stared around at the build-

ings, befuddled. "Where are we?"

"Erie. You've slept all the way from Warren."

"I was just resting my eyes."

"The next time you rest them try not to snore. Wonder where the library is in this town."

"On the next corner."

"How do you know? Have you been here before?"

"I can see the sign."

Jack laughed. "Okay, eagle eye, now try spotting a parking place."

Much to my surprise, having believed we faced a hopeless task, finding a place to park took longer than finding the name we were looking for once we were inside the library. Jack ran his finger quickly down the U's in the city directory, then looked up triumphantly. "Here we go, Matilda Ustafinowski."

"Some moniker. Doesn't sound like a femme fatale to me. What makes you so sure it's her?"

"Because it's the only name here that fits."

"Maybe the one we want isn't in the book."

"And maybe someday you'll find something to feel optimistic about." He jotted the name and address in his notebook, slammed it shut again and said, "So let's make tracks. This should be fun."

It didn't strike me that way, but I had no choice but to tag along beside him. He stopped at a gas station for directions, and

fifteen minutes later we cruised past the house, a rambling brick Tudor set well back from the street and shaded by tall trees. For the first time since awakening I realized the sun was shining and it should be about the third or fourth inning at League Park in Cleveland.

Rather than pulling into the driveway after turning the Auburn around, Jack parked on the street in front of the house. While walking up the long concrete drive I decided not to wait for instructions. "I know, let you do the talking. Just exactly what do you plan on saying to this Tillie whatever-her-name-is, provided she's home?"

He was grinning. "I don't know. Whatever comes to mind when she opens the door."

"Suppose her husband opens the door?"

"Then we'll play it the same way."

"What did it say about him in the directory?"

"Couldn't you guess? He's a building contractor."

The button at the front door activated chimes that sounded four notes, then four more at a higher pitch. Listening to them would have been like having the clock in the tower at Good-year's Willard Street gatehouse striking the half hour in your living room.

Jack waited a minute or more, then punched the button again.

When he raised his hand a third time I said, "There's nobody home, Jack. Let's go. This is starting to give me the heebie-jeebies."

He hit the button again. "Relax, buddy. Somebody's in there, I can feel it."

"Then why don't they come to the door?"

"Hold your horses. Give whoever it is a little time."

"We've been here six or seven minutes already."

"More like three. Maybe she was in the tub and has to slip something on."

"It's the middle of the afternoon, Jack. Who takes a bath in the middle of the afternoon? And even if we leave right now we'll be late for supper."

"Quit fretting. I told Mrs. Bauer this morning we wouldn't be home for dinner and not to cook for us."

"Oh, swell. That means going hungry or spending money at a restaurant."

Jack laughed under his breath. "I'll put it on my expense account. The trouble with you, Bram, is—"

The door opened suddenly, making me jump a little. A woman much like Hazel Morgan stared at us from one eye. The other was swollen shut, the flesh around it a livid purple streaked with blue. Even so you could see she was a beauty. Len Morgan knew how to pick them,

but I was shocked to find he had picked a second that so strongly resembled the first.

Barely loud enough for us to hear, she said, "How did you get here so soon? Who called you?"

Jack, for once caught off guard by unexpected questions, was longer than usual in replying. When he did, instead of responding to them he said, "I'm Jack Eddy, Mrs. Ustafinowski, and this is my associate Abraham Geary." Not only had he recalled her name, something I couldn't have done right then for a million dollars, but he had introduced me as Abraham, a name I seldom remembered was mine. Then he said, "May we come in?"

Only later did I realize she thought we were policemen. Jack had picked up on it immediately and made no attempt to correct her. She turned and walked away, Jack right behind her, so that I was left to close the door. I followed them along a paneled hallway leading to a staircase that curved upward to the second floor. Before reaching it they entered a room on the left so I did the same, suddenly apprehensive, sensing that something was badly wrong here but not yet certain what it was.

As usual Jack was drawn to the fireplace, this one of gray fieldstone rising to the ceiling and lacking a mantel for him

to lean on. Tillie Ustafinowski went to a window and for a moment stood staring out, her back to us. For the first time I was aware of her long pink housecoat trimmed with white fur at the collar, ankles and cuffs, and that underneath it there was only her willowy body.

When she turned she brushed aside a lock of honey-blond hair, then nodded toward the door leading to a sun room facing south at the rear of the house. "In there," she whispered.

I followed Jack to the doorway, knowing instinctively what we'd find. A man lay sprawled on his back near the center of the room. His right hand was on his chest, touching the edge of a stain that earlier would have been red but now was crusty brown. Even though his eyes were sightless there was a look of anger on his face.

Jack turned abruptly and went to the woman, taking her arm and gently leading her to a chair. He asked if she would like something, water or brandy or a cup of tea. She said, "Brandy," looking in the direction of a tall cabinet near the archway to the hall. Jack nodded to me. I found armagnac in one compartment, a snifter in another.

She held it with both hands, taking a long drink and then, without attention to what she

was doing, placing the snifter on a table beside her, coming close to upsetting it. When she looked at Jack he said, "Tell us what happened." His tone was low, soothing.

She spoke so quietly that I had to lean forward to catch what she was saying. "He hadn't said anything until this morning. Not a word since that day. That was worse than if he had, being ignored as if I didn't exist. But I understood, of course."

She picked up the snifter again and emptied it. I took a step toward her but Jack caught my eye, then shook his head.

"I came down late this morning, thinking he had gone to the office, but he was still here. He started to scold me. He kept getting angrier and angrier. He said things about me, called me terrible names. He—" she choked a little, then cleared her throat "—he had a right to, I know, but then he walked over and hit me in the face. He had never done that before. It knocked me down and when my robe fell open he laughed and said something even worse.

"Then after I got up he picked up his gun. I don't know where it was, I hadn't seen it until then. He said he ought to shoot me, too, and pointed it at me. But he didn't. He dropped it on the table by the door, then went and stared out the window for a long while.

"When he turned back his face was awful. I never saw him like that before, not even that day. He said, 'You think that was something before? I'll show you what a beating really is,' and then he came for me again.

"That's when it happened, but I don't even remember it. He was just lying there on the floor, that's all, and the gun was in my hand. I hadn't even heard it go off. It was heavy and when I looked down at it, it fell out of my hand."

Her eyes had drifted away from Jack as she talked and now she was gazing at the floor. A silent moment passed, then she raised her head abruptly, looking toward him again, and in a clearer voice said, "That was all that happened."

"Tell us about the day in Ash-tabula."

She shook her head as if she had no answers. "I don't know how he found out. He followed me there, I suppose. We had two hours until train time so we decided to wait in Len's little apartment. I had only been there a few minutes when Walter suddenly burst in the door. I can't understand why Len hadn't locked it, can you?"

"Then your husband shot him?"

She nodded her head. "Wouldn't you think that someone would have heard the shot? No one did, and it was in the

middle of the afternoon. He made me sit there for hours with Len lying on the floor only a few feet away. All that time he never said a word. Then when it got dark he made me help carry Len's body down to his car. I still can't understand why no one saw us. A man in a car parked across the street *did* see us but he must have thought Len was drunk or sick and we were helping him. Then Walter told me to drive straight home and if I didn't he would shoot me, too."

"Why did you wait all those months before leaving for Mexico? That's where you were going, wasn't it?"

"Len said we could live a life of luxury there with nearly a hundred thousand dollars. We were going to go months ago, but Len's partner wouldn't give him the money he owed him. Without that we wouldn't have had enough. Less than fifty thousand, Len said."

"You mean Swift wouldn't hand over the insurance money?"

"Insurance money? No, it was the money he was giving Len for his share of the business. It wasn't until a week ago that Len forced him to turn it over, and then he did it only because Len threatened to expose something the man had done in the past. Len said he knew about him helping to kill a man."

"What happened to the money?"

She just looked at Jack a moment, then began shaking her head again. "I suppose it's still in the apartment. Len had it in a leather briefcase. He was so happy to finally have it all, he showed it to me as soon as I got there."

"Neither you nor your husband took the briefcase when you left?"

"No. I hadn't thought about it before, but Walter must have known what was in it because he put the briefcase back on the couch. He just left Len's suitcase where it was by the door."

"I don't suppose either of you locked the door behind you on the way out?"

"Locked the door?" She smiled wryly. "Why would we do that?"

Jack went over near her chair. "Thanks, Mrs. Ustafinowski. My friend will call the police now and then we'll leave."

She stared up at him, confused again. "The police? But who are *you*?"

"I'm working for the insurance company that fifty thousand really belonged to. I want to get it back."

We were twenty minutes down the road to Akron before I finally broke the silence. "This is the damndest mixed-up mess I can ever remember. Did you believe her about the money?"

I mean not knowing how Morgan got it?"

"Sure I believed her. Why would he have told her he had committed murder to get it? Funny thing is, if Morgan hadn't been greedy they could have lived high in Mexico on what he already had stashed away. I don't suppose we'll ever know where that came from."

"What happened to the money in the briefcase, Jack? Are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"Natch. You don't have to be a Philo Vance to figure the guy in the car across the street was Harry Swift."

Another five minutes went by, then I said, "The strangest thing of all is that Morgan picked a girlfriend so much like his wife. I mean to do all that he did when there was so little difference . . . well, I just don't understand."

Jack was grinning again. "One thing you have to learn, buddy, never try to figure out why people do the things they do when they think they're in love. Just accept it and look for the answers to the important questions."

It almost seemed that Harry Swift was expecting us, which he may have been.

All the bluster had deserted him. He had had twenty-four hours to think about it and he was frightened.

We took our same places in his study, Jack resting an elbow on the fireplace mantel again, Swift in the chair behind the desk. He didn't interrupt or even look up as Jack laid it out for him.

"We know you helped Morgan fake that accident with the train, Harry. We know you tried to hold out on him then with the fifty grand. You had figured out his whole setup, so when he threatened you, you were ready to almost double your money and get rid of Morgan for once and for all at the same time. So you made a deal with Ustafinowski, probably told him the money really was yours and that in exchange for getting it back you'd give him the man his wife was running off with."

Harry Swift smiled, holding his hands out palms upward. "Look, boys, we're all men of the world. The fifty thousand is right here under the desk. Take it, it's yours. Tell your company you struck out. Nobody'll ever be the wiser and each of you will have twenty-five big ones. That's a lot of scratch, boys, right?"

"Let's see the color of the dough, Harry."

He reached down and pulled a brown leather briefcase, probably Morgan's, from under the desk. Jack watched him carefully, keeping his right hand in the side pocket of his suitcoat

so it was pointed toward Swift. The only thing in it was a Kay-woodie pipe he had borrowed from me before we went inside.

Swift laid ten stacks of bills on the desk, each with a bank wrapper around it. Jack went through them one at a time. When he was satisfied it was all there he looked up at Swift. "Got something I can put this in, Harry?"

Swift, his smile more genuine, pushed the briefcase toward him. "Here, use this. I'm glad you boys decided to play it smart."

Jack stuffed the money inside. "Smart, that's the only way to be." He turned to me. "Okay, Bram, give one of your cop friends a buzz while I keep an eye on our pal here."

I couldn't help smiling at the look on Harry Swift's face as I got up and went to the phone on his desk.

"**Y**ou know, Jack," I said when we were back outside the house after turning the briefcase over to Hazel Morgan, "that insurance company didn't make out so good. They have to pay Wellington for the work you did and Mrs. Morgan still has the fifty thousand payoff."

"They don't care. At least the guy I talked to didn't sound like it. He said they can close the

books on the case again now that they know they weren't cheated. Fifty grand, that's small potatoes to an outfit like that, but if the word got around that they'd been taken by a pair of con artists it could do them a lot of harm."

"It's a funny world, Jack. I mean I just don't understand a lot of what goes on. I know it *does* go on but that doesn't mean I understand it."

"So why waste time trying? Are you going down and write your story tonight?"

"What choice do I have? Just drop me off downtown, then I'll take a cab home and give Goldsmith the bill in the morning."

Ben Goldsmith was so tickled with the story he didn't even complain about paying the taxi fare. He had read it before I arrived in the morning and he told me to take the day off. "You've got it coming," he said. "If anybody squawks about it upstairs, I'll give 'em what for and put you in for overtime for working yesterday when you were supposed to be off."

Mrs. Bauer was concerned when I walked into the boarding house while she was vacuuming the breakfast crumbs from the dining room floor. "Are you sick, Bram?" she said.

When I explained why I was back home at eight in the morning she said, "Well, you just sit right down here and I'll fix you

a decent breakfast. It's a shame the way you have to leave for work so early and miss eating with the rest of us. A man needs to eat right, you know."

Later I relaxed on the front porch, enjoying having nothing to do, no plans for the day, no one ordering me around. I couldn't escape the Morgan affair, though. Every time I tried to it came slipping in the back door of my mind. I found myself attempting to think like Len Morgan so I would understand what it was that led him to hatch the scheme that worked out so disastrously. The similarity between the two women in his life continued to puzzle me. I began to wonder if getting away from his daughter Marcia wasn't one of the major enticements that started him down a road leading to three murders.

Late in the morning I called Goldsmith and learned that Harry Swift was being charged with murder in the death of the man known only as Shakey and with conspiracy to commit murder in the shooting of Morgan. Swift had admitted driving a second car, one Morgan had bought under his assumed name, to the remote railroad crossing where the fake accident was staged.

On the spur of the moment I decided to drive up to the ball game. It had turned out the one the day before had been called

on account of wet grounds, so Jack had been right after all.

Along the way I picked up a *Times-Press*, the first edition. My story was on page one, but didn't rate the banner headline. That went to Amelia Earhart. Her plane had vanished in shark-infested Pacific waters, out of gas when she and navigator Fred Noonan hadn't been able to locate tiny Howland Island. Her around the world "just for fun" flight had ended seven thousand miles short of its mark and there seemed little likelihood that the massive search underway would turn up anything other than empty ocean.

Below the fold was the latest on the Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run. The Cleveland police were still as baffled as they had been by the first of the serial killings nearly two years earlier.

The game went like everything else had that week. With the bases loaded with Tigers, Rudy York homered in the second inning and Detroit went on to beat Cleveland 9-5. I was back alone on the porch swing on Dudley Street before supertime. For a while I thought about Shakey, about who he had been, where he had come from, why he had ended up as an anonymous alcoholic in Ashtabula. And about Tillie Ustafinowski, what she was being

charged with and what would happen to her. Just trying to sort out where everyone would stand trial, or would have if they were still alive, was a job in itself.

A little before six Jack Eddy wheeled the big Auburn to the curb in front of the house. He hurried around to the sidewalk, grinning and slapping a fender along the way, then came up the steps two at a time and perched on the railing near me.

"You'll never guess the new case the agency picked up today," he said.

"You're right about that."

"The client is Hazel Morgan."

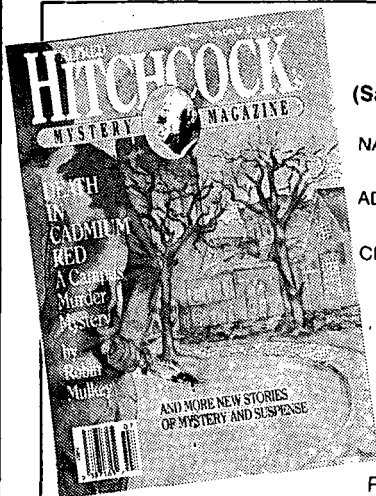
I pulled up from my comfortable slouch. "Hazel Morgan? What's the deal?"

"It's about Marcia."

"What about her? Quit playing games."

"She's disappeared. Her and the briefcase with the fifty grand."

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FICTION



Multiple Submissions

by Catherine L. Stanton

“**Y**ou really should be out there eating, Sam,” Hildy said, “not in here helping me.”

St. Clair Backhouse Bellamy, known to his friends as Sam,

kept on chopping carrots as though he were a caterer’s assistant and being paid per carrot, not per hour.

“I’d rather be here,” he said. “That guy makes me uncom-

fortable. Your knives need sharpening, Hildy."

"Everything in this house needs something done to it," Hildy said placidly. "That's enough carrots. Go back out and be sociable. I invited you as my one guest from the real world—you can't let me down."

The real world, to Hildegard Brettmann, meant the world outside the theater, and Sam wondered if it was a mistake to try to mix those two worlds at a dinner party. The conversation so far had been amusing enough, but it had rather excluded Sam, whose one connection to the theater was Hildy.

And that hardly counted, he thought, searching vainly for a sharper knife as a way to avoid going back into the dining room. He only knew Hildy because she'd hired him to replace the decorative moldings in her old house on the New Salem common. He knew she taught drama at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and that she sometimes directed plays, but he'd never seen any of them. She'd invited him to the theater several times in the past six months, but so far he'd been too busy, what with the ever-precarious business of trying to earn a living as a cabinet-maker, plus working non-stop to keep the crumbling mansion he'd inherited from falling down

around his ears. This was the first time he'd been out to dinner in weeks.

All the more disappointing, then, that Sam Bellamy, who could talk to almost anyone about almost anything, should find himself up against an impenetrable wall of shop talk. He'd decided, after the soup course, that helping Hildy in the kitchen would be more fun. And then there was that guy . . .

"Why does David make you uncomfortable?" Hildy was asking him, with the directness that Sam liked so much.

Sam glanced back into the dining room. David Boettinger, Hildy's director friend, was being as witty as ever at the head of the table. Handsome, auburn-haired Sam had felt unexpectedly like a country cousin next to David's urbane good looks. Even the grey taking over David's black hair seemed to be doing so artistically, and his utterly black eyes seemed to miss nothing, said or unsaid. Why *did* David make him uncomfortable?

"He just seems raw about something" was the best he could do to explain it to Hildy.

She nodded, and dumped the carrots he'd chopped into a salad bowl. "He is," she said, lowering her voice and pursing her lips so that she looked her sixty years all of a sudden. "And

since you are so perceptive, Sam, I will tell you why. David has for ten years been married to a woman who is also a director. I taught them both, in Washington ten years ago. I don't know what can be more difficult than two people trying to pursue the same career—and to pursue it together.”

“They worked together?” Sam already had a feeling that David's marriage had somehow ended.

“Very closely, although Elizabeth was always the—how should I say it?—disciple, and maybe that is one of the reasons she finally left him.” For some reason, Hildy's Swiss accent always became more pronounced when she told stories, Sam had noticed. “In any case, they had taken a job together in Chicago, as co-directors of a very good theater. And then—poof! The marriage ends. David tells it as a joke that he got to keep their record collection, and Elizabeth got to keep the job. But I don't think he feels it as a joke, poor David.”

That was Sam's opinion, too. David's jokes had seemed to be an attempt to cover up something too painful to refer to any other way.

“So that is why I invited him to come to Amherst,” Hildy finished briskly, tossing the salad as she spoke. “I was supposed

to be guest director of Dinosaur this year, but I already knew it would make too much work for me so I was glad of the chance to ask David instead. It is only a small theater, of course, but he needs desperately something to do.”

She looked around the kitchen, and then took five salad plates from a shelf in the refrigerator. “So. Plates, salad, and if you will bring that bottle of wine, we are ready. And Sam,” she dropped her voice again, “what I tell you about David and Elizabeth is not for everyone's ears yet. It is well known that they work together, but David does not want it well known yet that they are apart. I tell you this because I know you can keep a secret. Now, in we go—and for God's sake, Sam, let's try to talk about something besides the theater.”

Sam tried, and the rest of the evening was more enjoyable for him than the first part had been. But he still found himself avoiding David Boettinger's eyes, as though David's hurt was too glaring a thing to be looked at directly. Sam felt a little ashamed of himself for this. No doubt the proper human response was to offer aid and comfort, and to jolly David along as Hildy did. But Sam, who was so good at getting to the root of a problem, was un-

comfortable when he faced a situation where there was nothing to be done. Clearly David's situation was one of those, and Sam's instinct was to leave David in decent peace to get through it as best he could.

It wasn't until after dinner, when they were all saying goodbye at the front door, that David said anything personal to Sam. He'd shrugged into a soft leather coat that Sam mentally prevented himself from calculating the cost of, and ran a hand appreciatively along the new moldings that Sam had cut and installed last week.

"How nice," he said, "to work with something that stays put."

He was the first one out the door, and if Sam had been involved in the rest of the goodbyes instead of still mulling over David's words, he might have missed hearing the shots. There were two of them, muffled noises as though someone was firing a gun with a silencer. At first Sam hardly noticed. It was the first week of hunting season, and he'd been hearing guns all around his house in Royalston.

Then he did a double take. Hunters didn't use silencers, and there were no deer on New Salem common—and who the hell went hunting at ten thirty at night anyway? With the two

odd sounds still in his ears, he pulled open Hildy's front door and stepped out into the cool September night.

He didn't even have to look as far as David's sporty little car, parked at the end of the driveway. David hadn't made it that far. Sam dimly heard another car speeding away toward the highway, and Hildy asking what was wrong as he sprinted down the steps to the sprawled form on the pavement. All of the carefully-maintained tension seemed to have left David's body, and he'd made no attempt to break his own fall. He'd gone down with no surprise and no resistance, and Sam had a feeling, as he reached him, that David Boettinger must have been dead before he even hit the ground.

“So now again I am directing *Dinosaur* after all.”

Hildy had confessed to Sam quite early in their friendship that whenever she was tired or upset her command of English “to hell went.” It had been a week since David's death, and the shock of it was still showing in her syntax as well as her face.

“Do you know the worst of it, Sam?” She poured herself another cup of coffee from the pot in the tiny lobby. “That jackass

policeman is suspecting *me* of somehow killing David, because he thinks—the policeman thinks—that I am sorry I gave this job to David. And that I want it back. Can you imagine it? I wondered if he was making a joke.”

The word came out “choke,” with appropriate force. Sam sat down on one of the sofas lining the lobby’s walls. He felt the springs sagging ominously underneath him and deduced that the furnishings, like most of the Dinosaur Theatre Company’s assets, were donations.

“My experience of the police is that they don’t make a lot of jokes at the best of times,” he told Hildy, “and especially not when they’re investigating a murder. He can’t seriously suspect you, though—you were standing inside the house when David was shot.”

“I’ll tell you what I think.” Hildy’s voice was bitter. “I think he doesn’t have a notion—not even one—to tell him who killed David. He is grabbing at something. What is it I want to say, Sam?”

“Straws,” Sam suggested absently.

“Yes. Grabbing at straws. And so, you see, I call you away from your already-hard making a living, because I think maybe *you* can find something out. I remember the story Alicia told

me about the teddy bears.”

Alicia was the Dinosaur Company’s manager, and she had helped to organize Amherst’s annual teddy bear rally the year a woman had been murdered there. Sam had solved the puzzle of who had killed her and why, and the teddy bear story had apparently made a great impression on Hildy.

“So even though David made you uncomfortable, will you help find out who shot him?” Hildy was concluding. Her rather plain face, which could be surprisingly lovely when animated, today just looked tired, set in its triangular frame of pulled-back grey-brown hair.

“I’ll see what I can do,” he told Hildy. “I’ll need to know some more about this theater company, though.”

“About Dinosaur? Surely not.”

“Well, it’s a place to start. David only arrived in Amherst—what, last week? And his only connection here was this theater. It seems logical that his death and his job here might be related. Now—”

Hildy glanced at her watch. “Not now, my dear, I’m afraid. I must get back to my rehearsals. The poor children are upset enough as it is, without making them wait about and get nervous. Go and ask Alicia in the office—she knows everything about Dinosaur.”

She blew him an incongruous little kiss and went back through the swinging doors into the small theater.

Sam found Alicia Gordon in an undersized, overstuffed room that clearly doubled as coat-room and box office on show nights. The manager was slim and fair and neat, and the combination of the tiny office and the petite Alicia made Sam, at a broad-shouldered six foot three, feel slightly larger than life.

He also detected, in Alicia's shrewd brown eyes, a no-nonsense gleam that told him he'd be better sticking with a businesslike approach than in relying on the famous St. Clair Backhouse Bellamy charm.

"Ms. Gordon," he said briskly, as though he'd been chairing important meetings at IBM all his life. "Hildy Brettmann suggested I should ask you for some information about the theater company."

"Fire away," she said, and then winced. "Oh, dear. That was a bad choice of words, wasn't it? I suppose your questions have to do with David Boettinger's death."

"In a way."

The phone rang, and Alicia reached swiftly over and switched on an answering machine. "The phone's been driving me crazy all afternoon," she

explained. "We seem to be in the middle of a media event here. Now, what did you want to know?"

"Was Mr. Boettinger going to direct the whole season this year?"

"Yes. That's how we operate. It's an actors' collective, and the members pick a guest director every year."

"And this year they'd picked Hildy."

"Yes—but we knew she was reluctant to add to her workload. We understood completely when she suggested David Boettinger instead. And of course we were thrilled to get someone with his reputation."

"Doesn't he usually work with his wife?" Sam wondered whether David's secret had become public knowledge in the wave of publicity following his death.

Apparently it hadn't. "Usually he does," Alicia said, "but she had a prior engagement in Chicago this season. David was here alone." She reached toward a tall stack of paper and handed a brochure to Sam. "Would you like to look at our season's brochure? That'll tell you the sorts of things we do here at Dinosaur."

Sam was struck by the fact that all six of the season's plays were premieres. "Don't you have to do *Showboat* or *Oliver* once

a season to survive financially?" he asked.

Alicia looked pleased, as though she'd caught him out. "That's why we're called Dinosaur," she explained. "When the company was founded five years ago, the joke was that nobody doing new plays could survive—we'd be extinct in two seasons."

"But you're surviving."

"Just barely. We have a big script contest every year, in January, and the guest director for the next season picks the six best plays that are sent in."

The phone rang again, and Sam waited until the answering machine had taken care of it.

"When does the first play open?" he asked.

"Two more weeks, God help us. And I don't know why I'm cursing all these ringing phones, because with all the press coverage we've had, we'll probably be sold out long before opening night. You can't beat being dead for box office, I'm afraid."

"You mean people will come just because the director was killed?"

She opened her brown eyes wide at him, and Sam wondered why she was in the box office instead of on the stage. "Didn't Hildy tell you? That's what makes this play so weird. David was killed, yes, but so was the

playwright. He was a guy from New York—this was his first play. And just before the contest deadline, we got a letter from his wife asking whether she should withdraw the script because her husband had been shot by some mugger in Central Park. Can you believe that?"

Sam made it a rule never to believe anything without three kinds of proof. But he certainly took it back home with him to mull over, along with a spare copy of the play, *Keeping Secrets*. Hooked, as he always was when faced with an unsolved puzzle, he'd decided to take the title of the play as a personal challenge.

Sam still hadn't quite decided on an approach to take in dealing with the house he'd inherited from his Great-uncle Edward. It's only been six months since I moved in, he'd told himself for a while, and lately, Well, it's only been a year. The closest he'd come to a strategy in maintaining the decrepit and enormous place was to blind himself intentionally to the magnitude of the project and concentrate on one room at a time.

So far that had resulted in his setting up a shop on the first floor of the three story barn and taking over the kitchen for all the other functions of daily life.

The kitchen was bigger than the entire apartment where he'd lived before, and sometimes it was tempting just to stay inside it and forget the other thirty-three rooms and the decaying roof that covered them.

He'd moved the most comfortable of Uncle Edward's beds into one corner of the kitchen, and that was where he reclined to read the script that night. He poured himself a dram of his carefully-hoarded bottle of Lagavulin, on the theory that there is no kind of literature which cannot be improved by good malt whisky. When he was finished reading, he reached for the phone beside the bed and called Hildy. The suppressed yawn in her voice suggested she'd gone to bed already, and he apologized. Then he asked, "Is *Keeping Secrets* a good play?"

"I wouldn't have chosen it if it hadn't been," she replied around another yawn. "Couldn't you tell from reading it whether it's good or not?"

"All I could tell is that everybody in it seems to be married to at least two other people, and none of them has figured it out," he said. "It seemed very confusing."

"It's meant to be confusing," Hildy said. "In some ways, it doesn't matter whether you figure out who's married to whom."

That went directly against

Sam's grain, and from the amused sound in Hildy's voice, she realized it. "Not everything in this life is a puzzle we can sort out, Sam," she said. "That's what this play says, at the ending."

The ending had particularly bothered Sam. Of the dozen or so secrets carefully kept by the people in the play, none was ever exposed to the daylight.

"I have another question," he said, putting the play's subject matter out of his rather annoyed mind. "It's about the contest to pick the season's plays. Alicia gave me a copy of the rules."

"Yes?"

"What does it mean, in Rule 3, where it says, 'No plays under option, and no multiple submissions'?"

"That means please don't send us the same play that nineteen other theater companies are considering, because we will be very unhappy if we choose your play and then you tell us we can't have it."

"Okay, and Rule 4? It says, 'Under no circumstances will the judges enter into correspondence with any contestant regarding plays submitted to this contest.' Why include that?"

"If you'd ever had anything to do with a playwriting contest, you wouldn't need to ask. You'd be amazed at how many

people will send in a script and then call up or write and say, 'I've thought some more about the character of the hooker, and I'd like to make some changes,' or 'Please delete Act Two, Scene Three, where the old man dies, and substitute the enclosed scene, which is much better.' Playwrights are forever tinkering with things, and if you don't tell them point blank not to write to you, you'll be buried in letters just like that."

"So it's just a way of saying that once you submit a script, that's it?"

"Exactly. Except, of course, in the case of our first play this season."

Sam had been getting to that. "Did you ever find out anything more about the playwright's death?" he asked. "What's his name—Roland Webster?"

"Apparently it was just one of those senseless killings you read about so often—someone tried to rob the man, he resisted, and the mugger shot him."

"When did it happen?"

"Just after Christmas. His wife found a copy of his cover letter to Dinosaur among his papers and wondered whether she should withdraw the play from the contest because her husband was dead. Of course it didn't make any difference to us, but she was a very timid lit-

tle thing—I spoke to her on the phone—and she thought it might constitute a fraud or some such if she didn't notify us."

"Is she coming to see it?"

"Apparently not. She said she didn't even know he wanted to be a writer—he'd kept a few secrets of his own, I gather. Anyway, Mrs. Webster thought it would be too disturbing for her to come and see the play, and I suppose I can understand that."

Sam was beginning to think that directors had a professional stake in trying to understand everyone's motivations for everything. Certainly Hildy was always taking people apart in just the same way Sam approached a mystery.

"One more question," he said, "and then you can go back to bed. How do I get in touch with Elizabeth Boettinger?"

Sam woke up early, as he always did, and looked at the phone number he'd written down. It was an hour earlier in Chicago, and that meant it was probably too soon to call David Boettinger's widow. He got up, made coffee, and headed out to the shop. He spent an hour tinkering with his planer—he'd promised Hildy another installment of moldings sometime in the next month—and then looked at his

watch. Still too early, he thought. He had a hazy notion that people in the theater were genetically programmed to sleep later than impecunious cabinetmakers.

It was noon, and several perfectly good excuses later, by the time Sam realized he was simply avoiding talking to Elizabeth Boettinger. Maybe he didn't want to encounter the same kind of hurt he'd instinctively shied away from in David, or maybe he just wasn't sure how to go about it. It didn't matter—recognizing his own reluctance was the way to overcome it. He picked up the phone in his shop, and dialed the number Hildy had given him.

It turned out to be a work number. "Playworks," said a brisk male voice, and Sam asked to speak to Elizabeth. It took a while to convince the male voice to connect him—Ms. Boettinger was busy, so many people had called about Mr. Boettinger's death, she'd asked not to be bothered again this morning—but Sam's persistence finally won out.

"Elizabeth Boettinger," said a voice so luscious that Sam couldn't help conjuring up a picture of her. The voice sounded slender and elegant, and hinted at huge brown eyes that seemed on the verge of melting. He grinned, wondering whether she was in reality short and frumpy

looking. With a voice like that, it didn't matter.

"My name is St. Clair Backhouse Bellamy," he said, "and I'm helping the Dinosaur Theatre Company try to clear up some questions surrounding your husband's death." He decided to try the full-steam-ahead approach. "I'm wondering if you can give me any possible idea who might have killed him."

He could tell she was tired of talking about it, but she rallied admirably to the director's game he was asking her to play. "I could give you a dozen ideas," she said, "but they'd hardly be realistic ones."

"Try me."

"All right." She sighed. "A girlfriend, whom David had promised to marry when he was free, whom he'd reneged on. Hildy Brettmann, because she wanted her job at Dinosaur back. Myself, because he hadn't changed his will yet, and I inherit all those gorgeous leather coats of his. Someone at Dinosaur, because the theater's going broke and you can't beat a murder for publicity. The ghost of Lillian Hellman, because she thought David's *Children's Hour* in Maryland last season was silly and overblown. How am I doing?"

"That's only five, but it'll do." Sam remembered Alicia Gordon's similar statement about murder being good for box of-

fice, and he asked, "Isn't the idea of killing for publicity a little farfetched, though?"

"Is it? In my opinion, Mr. Bellamy, this is such a damn hard way to make a living, let alone a reputation, that anyone can be capable of anything. I've seen it before—not murder, of course, but last season I was directing a play about AIDS, down in Maryland. My first solo flight," she said, and Sam heard the drop of gall in the otherwise honeyed voice. "Anyway, the playwright was a gay man who had AIDS, and he died just before the play went into rehearsal. The theater company thought it was a publicist's dream, and they made a real circus out of it. It sold tickets like crazy, of course, but the playwright's family was very upset. His sister told me his parents hadn't even known he was gay, or that he was dying. But the box office people didn't care about any of that. Now, Mr. Bellamy, I'm really up to my eyeballs here, and I must go."

"Wait," Sam said quickly. "Would you describe your husband as basically an honest man? I mean, if he came across something crooked, what would he have done about it?"

"Pointed it out," she said without hesitation. "He was—well, ruthlessly honest, I guess. The truth was like his

god, onstage and off. Even when I told him I was leaving him, he—the most important thing for him was that he understand *why* I was leaving. It made it so much harder to leave." She gave a little laugh that wasn't amused. "I never figured out whether he did it on purpose. I never knew things like that about him, for certain." Her voice was suddenly less musical. "Why do you want to know?"

"Partly because the truth means a great deal to me as well," Sam said, "and partly because it's such a pleasure to listen to you talk."

"David always used to say that, too."

She hung up then, and Sam made an instant resolution that if he ever had to leave someone he cared about very much, he'd make damn sure that person stayed alive long enough for him to work out all the painful details.

“No, Sam. Absolutely not. It's a bad idea for any number of reasons, and if you won't even tell me why—”

"Why is it a bad idea?"

"Because you don't tinker with a playwright's work without his permission—”

"He's dead, Hildy. He can't give his permission."

"All the more reason. And I

don't want to ask the actors to learn a new ending, and you're acting like some cut-rate version of Hamlet, anyway."

"The new ending is only for opening night. Then you can have the old one back. And I don't know anything about Hamlet, so how can I be acting like him?"

Hildy looked sideways at him, as though she never would have asked him to help if she'd realized he didn't know anything about Hamlet.

"You are a frustrating man," she told him. "You stand there so calm, looking like you know all the answers, and let me fly about like a—like a what?"

"Chicken with its head cut off," Sam suggested, with a grin. "And I don't know all the answers, Hildy, but I'm ninety-nine percent sure I know how to find the person who shot David."

"Who is it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Then how can you find him?"

"By changing the ending of the play on opening night."

"I think it only offends you because it is not so neat and tidy as you like to make things," she challenged him.

His grin widened. "I hadn't even thought of that," he said. "Will you do it?"

"If I must." She made a face. "And no doubt the audience

will like the neat and happy ending better anyway," she said, "and you will have me wondering why I try to work in the theater at all."

"A little self-doubt never hurt anyone," said Sam, for whom ninety-nine percent was not nearly certain enough.

The Dinosaur Theatre was jammed for opening night, which is to say that all eighty-five seats were filled. Sam was not in one of them. He was backstage, trying not to get in anyone's way, and during Act Three, the final act, he was standing in the discreet hiding place Hildy had found for him, peering unobtrusively out into the audience.

Sam had always been rather good at faces. He'd been pleased to find, when he'd asked Hildy what Elizabeth Boettinger looked like, that the face he'd deduced from that luxuriously smooth voice had been very close to the original. "A knockout," Hildy had said, "with brown eyes you could go swimming in." But all Sam's projecting hadn't so far helped him to spot the person he was watching for in the audience. The happy ending Hildy had devised was going to have to do that for him.

It felt odd to be scanning the rows of faces from backstage, as

if they were performing for his entertainment. In the small window of the lobby door he could see the head of the police detective he'd enticed — laboriously, and with many references to teddy bears—into waiting in the lobby until the play ended. Sam looked over the audience again as the actor playing the main character started into the new lines Hildy had written. He saw attentive faces, bored faces, faces with no expression at all, but no faces with what he was watching for.

And then he saw it. Outrage. She was sitting close to the aisle, near the back, and the farther into the new ending the actors went, the farther down her jaw dropped. She might have been an attractive woman, but her inelegantly cut short blonde hair and nondescript clothes seemed deliberate, as though she preferred dowdiness. The shock on her face was impossible to miss.

Silently Sam threaded his way behind the stage and down the hallway that led to the lobby. When the play was over, he was standing next to the detective to point to the woman he'd seen.

"She's the one," he said, his confidence at one hundred percent now, "who killed David Boettinger."

And to his great surprise, she

didn't even try to deny it.

Sam hadn't anticipated that the opening night party would be so long-lived, or so mobile. It had started in the lobby, with champagne provided by the management. Sam had missed the champagne because he was at the police station explaining how he'd known that a woman he'd never met had shot David Boettinger.

He'd caught up with the party at Alicia Gordon's house in Pelham, and had followed it to Hildy's, mostly because Hildy kept insisting she wanted a word with him alone. In fact, Sam didn't mind waiting. There was a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label in Hildy's bar (to Sam's mind a very adequate compensation for the lack of single malt) and the usual theater shop-talk was superseded by the news that a woman had been arrested for David's murder. Sam was getting rather a kick out of listening to the various dramatic interpretations of what had happened.

"It was bizarre," said the drama student who had described his job to Sam as house-manager-uscher-chief-cook-and-bottle-washer. "The cop started to read her her rights and she started yelling about how of course she killed him and it

didn't mean anything now, because now everyone would know who she was."

"Who *was* she?" someone else wanted to know.

"Her name is Carole Teagarten," the house manager said, "but she wrote plays under a lot of different names—including Roland Webster."

"I don't get it."

"I'm not sure I get all of it, either." The house manager appealed to Sam. "Lots of people write under different names, but that doesn't drive them to kill directors, right?"

Sam looked into the amber depths of his drink and thought of the unpleasant scene at the police station. He'd known beforehand, of course, that secrecy must have been paramount to the person who'd killed David, but he hadn't anticipated how the need to keep a secret might actually take over your whole life, and eat you up as it had eaten Carole Teagarten.

"The problem was that when she wrote plays under her own name, they never got produced," he explained. "She told me she had over a thousand rejection slips in her files."

"Youch," said one of the actors.

"Hyperbole," said the lighting technician's wife, sententiously.

"Maybe," said Sam, "but the point is, she was getting nowhere as a playwright until she had the bright idea to kill herself."

Sam had already noticed that actors are shameless about taking over someone else's story. He sipped his scotch in silence, listening to the newest version of Carole Teagarten's tale, and thought what a good scam she'd managed to come up with. Correspondence between contestants and judges in a playwriting contest was heavily frowned on, of course, but what judge would refuse to read a letter from a grieving widow—or sister, or mother, as the case might be—asking to withdraw a play from the contest because its author had died?

"So what happens?" the actor was demanding. "The judges dig through the eight zillion plays that've been sent in—"

"It was only five hundred in this case," said the lighting technician's wife, who seemed to have a thing about accuracy.

"You'd think it was zillions, if you had to read them all," the actor shot back. "And after a while—believe me, I judged one of these things once—they all start to run together in your mind. Except for one. The dead guy's play. How tragic, you think. Cut down at the start of a promising career. And you

read the play again, and by gory, it's not too bad. And it keeps sticking in your mind, and when it comes to judging time you end up choosing the thing. It's a good play, plus you like the extra added touch of a posthumous premiere."

That was the advantage of professional training, Sam thought. If he'd downed as many beers as he'd seen the actor consuming over the course of the evening, the phrase "posthumous premiere" would have been far beyond him.

"How many times did she pull this stunt?" the house manager asked. They all turned to Sam.

"This was the fourth," Sam said. He thought of Carole Teagarten's pale face, animatedly describing her previous conquests. A university play contest in Missouri, where she'd written to say that her son the playwright—only twenty years old, poor lad—had been killed by a drunk driver. A festival of one-act plays in Florida—very sad, that one, with the young writer killing himself in the throes of an unhappy love affair. The implication that the love story was incorporated into the play had proved too much for the Florida theater company to resist.

And, of course, the play Elizabeth Boettinger had directed

in Maryland. "My first solo flight," she'd said, hinting bitterly at the difficulty of starting a career independent of her husband.

But Carole Teagarten, for all her careful study of the theater world, hadn't known that David and Elizabeth were no longer a unit. She'd assumed they were as close as ever, personally if not professionally, and the news that David had been hired to replace Hildy as the Dinosaur Company's director had scared her badly. Elizabeth—and David, by association—would no doubt remember the playwright so tragically dead of AIDS, and see the pattern.

It was one thirty before the party showed signs of leaving. It seemed to be undecided whether to break up or simply move elsewhere, but Hildy was dropping weighty hints that she, at least, needed to get some sleep. In a surprisingly short time, the party had vacated the half-renovated house on New Salem common, and only Sam was left.

"Let us take some air," Hildy said, stepping out onto the front step. "Delightful children, aren't they? But very energetic."

For a while they stood and contemplated the stars, in the enormous rural silence that Sam was finally starting to get used to. Then Hildy said abruptly,

"Was it really necessary for that woman to kill David?"

Sam had wondered the same thing. "From her point of view, I think it was," he said. "She talked about her plays as though they were more important to her than people."

Hildy nodded tightly. "Of course," she said. "I often feel the same way, when I am very involved with something. But I'm not a murderess, for God's sake." Her voice was tight too, holding both disgust and her need to know.

"I think," Sam said, "that if anyone had ever accepted one of her plays simply on its own merits, things would have been different. But no one ever did. The only way she ever got things produced was by using the dead playwright trick. And after a while it became so important to her that she would kill someone to protect it."

"As though to keep the secret was the whole purpose," Hildy mused. "And of course you were making a safe bet that she

would come to see her play on opening night. Even an anonymous playwright cannot resist seeing her work on the stage."

Sam watched her unraveling the problem of Carole Teagarten and decided to leave before she turned that analytical mind on *him*. "I should be going, Hildy," he said, and started down the driveway toward his antique pickup truck. Halfway there, he paused, next to the spot where David Boettinger had been shot by Carole Teagarten. "I guess you'll be going back to the original ending for the play tomorrow," he said, looking back.

Hildy's face was in shadow. "Of course," she said, "although the audience will always prefer a happier ending."

"Don't give it to them," Sam said authoritatively. "You were right—things just aren't that neat and tidy."

"That is why we try to make them so," Hildy said, and Sam knew she'd been trying to figure him out after all.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



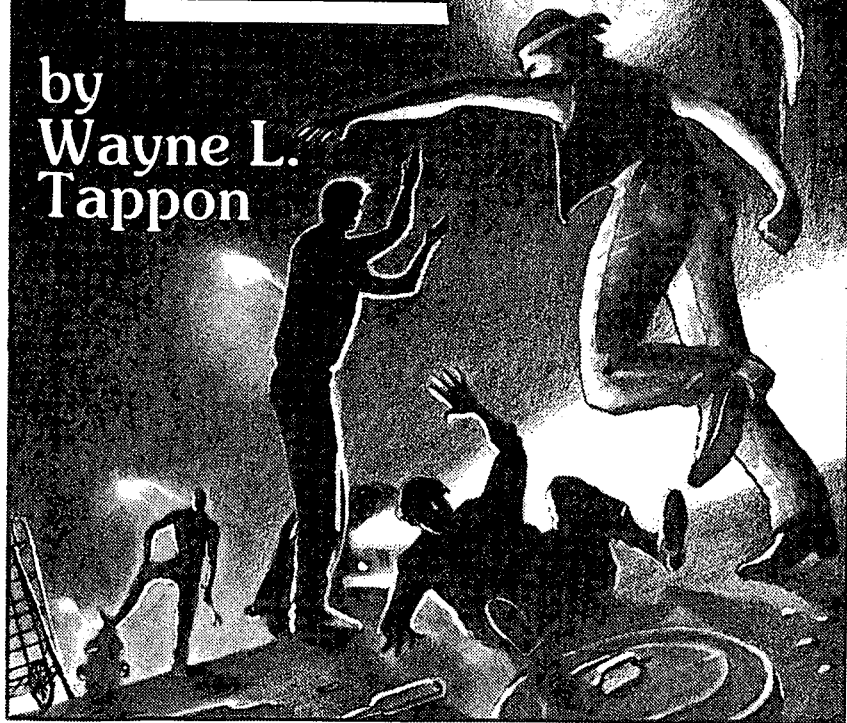
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Nice weather for ducts. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

What Goes Around

by
Wayne L.
Tappan



The little two-wheeled wire cart I was pulling was even shakier than I was. Actually I wasn't doing too bad, although I resented the little stabs and gnawing pains in my

back and knees and feet, because inside I didn't feel any older than I had forty years ago. At least I wasn't squeaking and wobbling as bad as the flimsy little cart. I was striding along

at a nice easy pace, pretending to be young, while the little cart with my one sack of groceries skittered and bounced along behind me.

The hip still hurt, but I guess I was lucky it hadn't broken when they slammed me down on the sidewalk. Anyway it was never going to get back to normal—whatever normal was for a guy with all my years—unless I exercised it every day. There was one good thing about it. When the hip was throbbing, I didn't even notice the other little aches and twinges.

I was only vaguely aware of the car cruising toward me, and I don't remember what I was thinking about, but even when the battered green Volkswagen bug swerved to the curb alongside, my first thought was that they were tourists lost in the city. I'd even stepped towards the car to help when I saw the swarthy, grinning face of the one they'd called Paco.

Oh, Lord. Not again. Last time they were driving a Ford. I glanced around but there was no one in sight in any direction. The city was tearing down everything in the area to make room for a new high rise development. I was in front of some old boarded up stores that were scheduled for the wrecking ball, and across the street, the bulldozers had already done their

work, leaving only flat, empty space where it looked as if even weeds were afraid to grow. There were probably half a million people within a radius of five miles, but as far as help was concerned, I might as well have been in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

Paco got out of the car and leaned against the front fender, grinning. He looked relaxed and friendly.

"Hey, mon. What's happening? Did you bring us some more stuff?"

He was still wearing the blue bandanna, knotted into a sweat band around his head. He wore no shirt under the black leather vest, and there were flickers of gold in his white, mocking smile. The driver came around the car, and the third member of the group climbed out of the back seat to stand grinning beside Paco.

Damn! I braced my legs into a parade rest stance to try to conceal the trembling in my knees. I hated them for their brutality and smirking arrogance, but mostly I hated them for knowing that I was afraid. I took a deep breath and it seemed to steady me a little.

"Don't tell me it's going to take all three of you to beat up a sixty-eight-year-old guy again?" I knew it wasn't smart to rattle these guys' chains, but

I was so mad I couldn't seem to resist trying to stuff my foot in my big mouth.

"Thirty or forty years ago, I could've put all three of you punks in the hospital."

The three looked at each other and burst into gales of laughter. The one from the back seat with the large gold earring and the Grateful Dead T-shirt sank helplessly to the ground holding his sides. The driver, whose skeletal frame was at least six three, slapped his hand up and down on the sloping hood of the Volkswagen, bellowing with laughter. Paco clapped his hands in delight.

"Hey, mon, you're funnier than Bob Hope. You know, mon?"

I looked into the cold eyes and suppressed a shudder. They seemed to glitter with an ancient malevolence that was even more frightening because it was impersonal.

Paco stopped laughing and the other laughter ceased immediately as if a switch had been turned off. He straightened and stepped forward. He smoothed his hands across my old sweater, and patted me on the chest.

"Hey, if you don't want to get messed up, mon, just give us what you got. We won't hurt you." He looked back over his shoulder with a leering wink and added, "Much."

This sent his companions off into another fit of laughter which they dutifully kept up till he snapped his fingers.

"How much money you got?"

"A little less than twenty dollars."

"Twenty bucks? That's all you got? Twenty bucks?"

"I've got less than twenty bucks and I need all of it." I swallowed and added, "It's all I've got."

They had crowded around me in a tight little semicircle so I was staring at a panorama of reds and blues and faded greens on tan. There were blue grinning skulls, daggers with hissing snakes entwined around the hilts, black leopards snarling hate, and pierced hearts spilling out fountains of blood. I was swimming in a sea of tattoos. No one was laughing now.

"I think you're lying, mon. I think you got money. Why don't you give it to me and maybe we'll let you go."

I fumbled my worn billfold from my hip pocket and handed it to Paco. "See for yourself. There's only about eighteen dollars in there."

Paco snatched the bills from the wallet, glanced at them and shoved them in his pocket. He stared at my driver's license and read aloud, pronouncing each syllable slowly. "Thomas S. Graszik, 1622 Agnes Street, Los Angeles."

He pronounced Graszik with an "ah" sound which is pretty close, but Thomas came out sounding like "Toe-moss." Paco stared at my picture for a moment, then tucked my billfold into the waistband of his grimy jeans. He was several inches shorter, and had to look up to glare at me. With no change of expression, he slammed his fist into my middle, catching me completely by surprise. I doubled over fighting for air, and watched my knees in wonder as they decided not to hold me up any longer.

I was still struggling to breathe again when Paco hauled me to my feet. I tried to stay upright but the one on Paco's left shoved a booted foot behind my legs and with a contemptuous shove, Paco knocked me over the extended leg and up against the store front. Even as I was stumbling backwards on my silly-putty legs and trying to get a breath, I remember thinking, Don't fall on the lame hip.

Strangely, the impact seemed to jar loose the breathing mechanism and I was able to gulp in some air. I looked up as Paco approached and managed to roll to my knees, but I was immediately sorry when he delivered a hard kick to my thigh, toppling me back to the pavement. At least the creep had missed the hip.

"Hey, mon. You holding out on us?" Paco and the tall one were bending over me and each grabbed a front pocket of my old khaki work pants. They both started jerking, lifting me off the ground and slamming me back until the pants ripped apart and spilled the meager contents of the pockets onto the sidewalk: fifty-seven cents, a key ring with a four leaf clover pressed in plastic, and four keys.

I hoped that would satisfy them, but after a few words of Spanish, I got another kick and a shove. They rolled me over onto my face and ripped the rear pockets away. My handkerchief, still folded, was all that fell out. Then Paco grabbed me by the shoulder, swung me around, and jerked me into a sitting position. I was scared, and I was overwhelmed with a sense of total helplessness, but I was also mad. If I'd had a grenade, I'd have pulled the pin and self-destructed just for the satisfaction of seeing them blown to hell along with me.

"Listen, old man. You got more money. Did you leave it at home?" Paco's breath was foul in my nostrils.

"No. That's it. It's all I've got."

Paco's fist, cluttered with cheap rings, ripped into my cheekbone and suddenly the voices sounded very distant — like the voices on TV when you

think you're watching but you're almost asleep. There was numbness but not much pain.

"Maybe we should go to your place and look around. Maybe you could remember better." Paco had a handful of my shirt and was using it to hold me up. "Answer me, mon. You think we can find money at your place?"

I heard the question and was trying to answer, but nothing seemed to be working right. It was like the time I had my appendix out and I could hear them yelling at me in the recovery room asking me if I was awake. Paco's questions seemed to be just about as stupid. Before I could form the words, I was slammed down on the pavement so that the back of my head bounced off the concrete, then jerked back into a sitting position. It seemed important to try to explain before they put me to sleep again.

"There is no money at my place." A little stream of blood oozed out with the words and ran off my chin onto my shirt. I knew I had to concentrate.

"It's too close to the end of the month. I never have much at the end of the month."

He dropped me and straightened up. A burst of Spanish rattled among the three, and while they talked I was beginning to make sense of my surround-

ings. My tongue had discovered some wobbly teeth, but they were still attached. I was thinking vaguely of what a shame it would be to hang onto those teeth for sixty-some years and then have to spit them out on Paco's dirty running shoes.

When Paco hunkered down in front of me and lifted me up again, he was smiling and almost gentle. "So maybe next week you'll have more money?"

When he said that, I realized my blunder. Damn! I'd practically invited them back for my Social Security check. He got all the confirmation he needed from my face. I tried desperately to think of an explanation, but my brain wasn't exactly functioning at warp speed. Paco smiled, patted my cheek, and laid me back down slowly. He stood up, pulled out my wallet and examined the driver's license again. His face split into a broad smile as he tossed the wallet onto my chest. "Hey, mon, maybe we'll see you next week. If we don't run into you, maybe we'll come by and see how you're doing." He squatted down, showed me a toothy smile, and winked. "I don't think you want to call no cops now that we know where you live." He gave me what I guess was supposed to be a friendly little slap on the cheek, but it still spun my head around.

I raised myself on one elbow and watched as the three climbed into the VW roaring with laughter. I rolled over, struggling to my feet, and looked around for the cart. It was bent and mangled into a wad of twisted wire and metal. The groceries were gone.

I was trying to bend over to retrieve my keys and change when the police cruiser spotted me. The two officers stared as they got out of the car. They took in the tattered pants, the bloody shirt and sweater, and I guess my face was a little startling. I staggered a little when I straightened up and they leaped to help. I spat out some blood and asked, "Where were you five minutes ago?"

The officers insisted on an ambulance and then followed me to the emergency room. Everything seemed to be working—after a fashion—so I refused to let the interns take X-rays because I wasn't sure whether or not Medicare would cover it. I got a few stitches and some clucking over my many colorful bruises, and then was told I'd have to stay overnight for observation. They got a little insistent when I turned down their invitation but backed off when I became hostile and finally turned me over to the police.

The patrol cops took descrip-

tions of the punks and the car and asked if I'd gotten the license number. When I said no, they looked knowingly at each other. They knew senility when they saw it. I did get a ride home, though.

The next morning I could hardly get out of bed to answer the door. It took me two tries to get my feet over the side and planted on the floor, and when I finally managed to raise myself up, I found the only way I could walk was doubled over dragging one leg—like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I felt as though I'd been sacked twenty times by the Chicago Bears.

"I'm coming! Hold your horses." I was getting a little better by the time I got through the two tiny rooms to the door, and almost standing straight when I got my hand on the knob and called, "Who is it?"

"Police. It's Sergeant Perez. May I come in?"

It didn't sound like Paco so I opened the door. The man standing in front of me holding his badge and I.D. folder wasn't much taller than Paco. He was somewhere in his forties and wide but not what you'd call fat; more like a slab of marble that hasn't had much chiseled away yet. He was brown all over. His face, his suit, his shoes, and his tie were all shades of brown like

autumn leaves raked into a pile. His shirt was even a shade of tan. Only his hair was black.

"Mr. Graszik? I'm Sergeant Perez." He tossed a thumb back over his shoulder. "This is Detective Bill Henderson." He looked me up and down, and watched as I staggered slightly stepping back from the door. "They worked you over pretty good, didn't they?"

"They always do."

He almost smiled as they entered and looked curiously around my pocket size apartment with the sink and hot plate and tiny refrigerator at one end of the living room.

"We've been going over the patrol report, and we have some questions. I take it these were the same three who assaulted you on..." He paused and pulled a paper out of his inside pocket. "On May ninth?"

"Yeah. It was the same ones. Last time they called the leader—the little guy—Paco. I didn't hear any names this time." I shifted my weight and winced. "Can we sit down?"

"Of course." Perez didn't apologize but he and Henderson moved across to the lumpy davenport and I sank stiffly into my comfortable recliner.

In contrast to Perez, Bill Henderson was tall and rangy and a little gawky looking—something like a young Gary

Cooper. He didn't have a coat or tie, and he wore his grey and green striped sport shirt outside of his chinos.

Perez leaned forward. "It says here that the first time they got eighty-six dollars. This time only eighteen?"

"That time I still had quite a bit of my Social Security money, and they got all of it. This time I had a twenty hidden in the toe of my shoe, but other than that, I'm tapped out till the check comes next week."

I explained about the threats and how they'd promised to come see me. I noticed that as he listened Sergeant Perez's eyes developed the same deep glitter I'd seen in Paco's. His expression reminded me of a stalking jaguar.

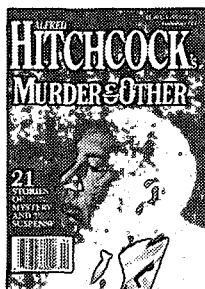
His voice was calm, belying the intensity in his eyes. "From the descriptions we've gotten—and everyone has remembered the tattoos—we're almost certain that your muggers are the same ones that have assaulted several other senior citizens in this neighborhood. For a while, they seemed to be picking their victims at random. Mostly women. They'd mug them for what they could get and rough them up a little. Now they're going to their victims' homes, and in some cases, hurting them bad."

Perez leaned his elbows on

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK

MURDER & OTHER Mishaps

Want to
catch a
murderer?



Want to catch a thief?
Linger in the darkness of a turreted
mansion or merge with the shadows
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his knees and clasped his hands in front of him. "They've made several house calls lately, and earlier this month, they got into the apartment of an elderly lady they'd mugged three months before." The glitter in his eyes became more intense. "They racked her up pretty good because she didn't have any money to give them. Her Social Security check is deposited directly into her checking account. She got out of the hospital yesterday."

I swallowed and tried to look casual. "So I guess I can look forward to more fun and games?"

"We hope not." Perez frowned as he continued. "We don't think they live around here. They cruise this area because there are a lot of senior citizens." He gazed moodily at the backs of his hands. I glanced over at Bill Henderson and caught him staring at me. I couldn't tell from his expression whether he was sympathizing or just fascinated with my lumpy appearance. Perez went on.

"They've used at least four different cars and we don't have a license number on any of them. Yours is the best description we've gotten of the suspects." He sighed. "They've apparently decided to hang out where the pickings are easy. Unfortunately, we can't be with their victims twenty-four hours a day."

"How many people do you figure these guys have mugged?"

Perez grimaced, and Bill Henderson, who hadn't said a word yet, answered. "Seventeen that we know of," he said. Perez stood up and added, "They're playing rougher now. We'd like to get them before they kill someone. Would you like to come down and look at the mug books again?"

"Not unless you've got a lot of new ones." I'd spent all day at the station after the last thumping and hadn't spotted even one of them. "Thanks for dropping in to cheer me up."

After they left, I did some thinking. In a way I wished Mary were still here to help me figure out the best way to handle this mess, but on the other hand, I was glad she hadn't survived the cancer to face this threat with me. I made pot after pot of coffee that the doctors didn't want me to touch, and as I drank it, I put my mind to work on the problem. One thing was for sure, getting them arrested wouldn't be enough. They had to be convicted. They had my address, so if I helped nail them and some slick lawyer got them off, I'd be worse off than I was now.

In the afternoon I hobbled out of the apartment and grimly dragged myself around the block, determined to walk off the effects of the beating as

soon as possible. When I got back, I made more coffee and drank it while I thought some more. I spent the rest of the day and a restless night working on the problem.

In the morning I woke up sifting through ideas, and as I stared in the mirror at my purple, lumpy face with the slash on the cheekbone, a vague shadow of a plan began to form in my mind. On a conscious level, I decided I didn't need to shave yet.

For three days I went through the motions of existence while I sorted and sifted through possible plans of action. On the fourth day, I pulled out the phone books and went to work.

I started by calling a printer who wasn't a part of a franchise chain. I asked him where he bought his ink, and he obligingly gave me the name of a chemical company that made printing inks among other things. I called the supplier and found out that they did not manufacture fluorescent ink, but they gave me the name of a competitor who did.

Bingo! The competitor also made fluorescent powder, which was what I was really looking for. I found out I could go there and if I was willing to buy at least five pounds—which was the minimum—I could get it for about seven or eight bucks a pound. That was more than I

wanted to spend, but I had to look on it as a long term investment.

That part was so easy, I wasn't prepared for the troubles I ran into on the next part of the project. I called some electronic retailers, but when I described the kind of bug I was trying to buy, they got pretty weird. One guy told me the equipment I was looking for was highly illegal, and then asked me for my name and phone number. I may be senile, but I'm not stupid. I hung up on him, and went back to thinking.

I thought about calling Sergeant Perez, then changed my mind. Even if he had access to the device I needed, he couldn't very well justify handing it over to a civilian. I finally remembered a guy that was the radioman in my outfit in the Marines, three wars back. I hadn't seen Hank Foster in seven or eight years, but if he was still alive, he probably still had the little TV and radio repair place across town. I found his number and he was very much alive and still in business.

"Hank? This is Tom Graszik. It's been a long time."

"Tom? You old SOB, what in the hell are you doing these days? How's Mary?"

I felt a stab of pain at the question.

"Mary passed away, Hank. I

lost her a couple of years ago. I'm living by myself now." I swallowed hard and changed the subject. "Nowadays I try to keep fit by getting mugged every month or so."

I went on to explain about the problems I was having, and that I hoped to get the kind of tiny transmitter you can attach to a car with a magnet, like the kind you see on TV all the time that sends out a signal so you can locate and track the car at a distance.

"I've been told that what I'm looking for is illegal, Hank. What do you know about it?"

"Illegal as hell." Hank was cheerful. "About as illegal as the little black boxes people buy to get cable channels without paying for them, but everyone's got 'em. The police and federal agencies have tracking devices, of course, and so do half the private eyes in town."

"If I wanted to get something like that, how would I go about it?"

"Well, Tom, it would depend on what you wanted it to do. It's only a simple radio transmitter. The cops have some that are pretty involved; the receivers can triangulate the signals and show the location of the car on a grid on a screen. I could build you a simple one from a garage door opener, but it wouldn't have much range."

"How much would one cost that would send a signal four or five miles?"

"For that kind of power, you'd be looking at seven, maybe eight hundred dollars. That would be just a simple one-tone oscillator, and a portable receiver."

"I haven't got that kind of money." I was silent for a while thinking of alternatives. "It would have been nice, Hank, but I guess I can set these guys up without it. Thanks for the info, and maybe we can get together for a beer one of these days."

"Hold it a second, Tom." Hank sounded perplexed. "Were you planning to plant this bug on the car of the guys who mugged you? Don't you want to grow old?"

I sighed. "Hank, these guys almost killed a woman last week. They nearly crippled me, and they've promised to see me again. I figure I don't have a hell of a lot to lose. But thanks, anyway."

"Wait a second. Let me think." I could hear him humming tunelessly to himself for a few moments and then he said, "I've got a son-in-law who loves to tinker. Maybe we can dig around through some old stuff and see what we can come up with. Let me call you back. Are you still in the same place?" I gave him my new number.

I spent some time in the next few days installing a peephole in the door and hanging a two by four across some heavy brackets screwed into the frame. Paco could still break in, but not without knocking the whole door frame down. I knew I couldn't avoid him, I just didn't want our next meeting to be in my apartment.

Hank called me the same day my Social Security check arrived. He was proud and excited and rambling on so fast I couldn't follow most of what he was telling me. I don't understand electronics, so when I finally got him calmed down, he told me in plain English that he and his son-in-law had devised this pocket watch sized transmitter and attached it to a powerful little magnet. It would send out a distinctive beep-beep signal that could be picked up four or five miles away by almost any radio that had a short wave band tuned to the right frequency.

Hank shook off my questions about cost, babbling on non-stop, saying it was a loan, and he expected to get it back when I was through with it, and that he knew I'd be careful with his property, and when could I come and get it? I told him I'd be by the next day.

I'd sold the house and the car during Mary's final illness, and

now I either rode buses or walked. I mapped out my next day's schedule, listing all the stops I had to make, and then I wrote a letter to Sergeant Perez. I was going to need his help even if nothing went wrong, and in case I screwed it up, I wanted someone to follow through.

After my usual breakfast of Wheaties and black coffee, I took one of the white plastic shopping bags they give you at the market and stuffed a few more into it. I tossed in my Social Security check, a plastic freezer baggie, and a roll of adhesive tape. I was hoping Paco and his friends hadn't gotten impatient and decided to wait around outside for me, but everything was quiet on the short walk to the bus stop.

It was a long day. I had to make stops at the bank, the chemical company way out in the suburbs, the lamp shop that advertised black lights, and back across town to Hank's TV repair place. None of the places were very close to a bus stop, and by the time I got to Hank's place, I'd done a lot of walking. My legs and sore hip were protesting and I must have looked a little frazzled, because after Hank had demonstrated his gadget, he insisted on driving me home. I wondered if I should use his restroom to set myself

up with my new purchases, and then decided against it. I'd be getting a ride right to the door and if Paco caught me with all the stuff I had, I'd be dead anyway.

I sank gratefully into the upholstered luxury of Hank's aging Oldsmobile and looked across at him. He'd never been very big, but now he seemed to be shrinking. His skin sagged off his face and gathered in folds around his neck. His sad brown eyes and long nose completed the bloodhound image. In the car, I told him about Mary and explained why I was riding buses. Hank was puzzled.

"If you don't have a car, how do you figure to track these guys down? You think you can follow them in a bus?"

"Of course not, Hank. I figured the police would help. I wrote a letter to Perez and told him what I was planning to do."

He sighed. "You're a damn fool, Tom. You always did have more guts than sense. The police can't chauffeur you around following an illegal bug." He shook his head and went on. "I'll drive you and I'll help find them, but I don't want to get close. I finished my fighting forty-five years ago on Saipan."

I protested, but I knew he was probably right. Hank said his son-in-law was taking over the

business anyway, so he could be available any time I called. Assuming I was able to call. We decided to leave the short wave receiver and the black light lamp I'd purchased in Hank's car.

The next morning, I took the three hundred dollars I'd gotten from the bank—in twenties and fifties—and slipped them into the plastic baggie. I measured out a few tablespoons of the fluorescent powder, put them into the bag, and sealed the little zip lock. While I was shaking it all up together, I wondered what I was going to do with the rest of the five pounds. Nothing came to mind.

After a few minutes of jiggling, I dumped the excess powder from the baggie and refolded the package with the money inside, then pulled up my left trouser leg and taped the package to the inside of my calf. I put the tiny transmitter in my jacket pocket and sent up a fervent prayer that they'd knock me down at least once before they searched me. Based on recent history, it seemed likely. I left about twenty dollars in my billfold and I was ready for market.

I followed the route I'd used before so Paco wouldn't have to waste gas looking for me. Even then I didn't expect I'd be lucky enough to get mugged on my

first try, so I was a little surprised when on my way back, my friends actually showed up. But just in case, I'd bought very little at the market and I still had seventeen dollars left out of the twenty.

They must have been watching the market because they intercepted me about the same place as before. This time they were driving a '75 Chevy like the one I'd sold to help pay Mary's hospital bills. I glanced at the license without seeming to, and memorized the number. I stepped up close to the rear of the car and set my groceries on the sidewalk. Paco and the others got out and turned to me, but now I was between them and the car.

"Listen, fellas. Why don't you leave me alone? Get your mamas to turn an extra trick or two and you'll get more than I've got."

For a moment I thought I'd gone too far. I wanted them to knock me down, not kill me. Paco's face whitened, then darkened into a raw liver red. The tall one flicked open a six inch switchblade and made little figure eights in the air in front of my face. Paco elbowed him aside and grabbed a handful of my shirt.

"Hey, mon! You calling my mother a whore?" His fist lashed out and caught me on the jaw.

Perfect! He was too close to get much leverage but he still connected with enough punch so it was okay for an old man to fall down. I staggered back off the curb and sat down hard in the street. Ouch! As I rolled toward the back of the car, my right hand dipped into my jacket pocket and came out with the gadget. I pushed myself to my hands and knees by the rear bumper, palming the bug. I had to work fast before the kicks started but without appearing to hurry. I swung my arm up under the frame and felt the solid metal grab the magnet from my hand. Mission accomplished.

Just in time, too. The anticipated kicks arrived simultaneously; one on my skinny buttocks and one right on the sore hip bone. As I bounced off the bumper, I managed to slip my left pants leg up to let them discover the baggie taped to my calf.

That was enough to make them forget the insults to their parents. The switchblade slashed through the tape, carelessly gashing my leg, but they were excitedly ripping into the bills and ignored the blood streaming onto the asphalt. Paco glared at me in triumph.

"Hey, mon, you thought you could fool us, eh? You think we're stupid?" He snatched the

knife from his companion's hand and bent over me. He grabbed me by the jacket and jerked me into a sitting position and held the tip of the knife to my throat. "I ought to kill you, old man." He pushed the blade against my Adam's apple and deftly slit an inch of skin. I could feel the blood trickling down and knew the cut wasn't deep, but as I gazed into those cruel, obsidian eyes, I could feel my insides shrinking into an icy knot. I hadn't been this scared since I'd charged up that beach into enemy fire.

Then Paco was wiping the bloody knife tip on my jacket, and smiling at me. I couldn't tell whether the sour odor in my nostrils was coming from him or me. He stood up and closed the knife.

"We don't want to hurt you, mon. Maybe you'll have some more stuff for us again." His expression turned sad. "But you got to learn not to lie to Paco." He stepped back and nodded. The tall, cadaverous one with the cowboy boots stepped forward and aimed a kick at my kidneys. I tried to roll away but the toe of his boot caught me in the side and a blur of red pain blotted out the daylight. Another kick in the solar plexus stopped my breathing apparatus, so that I barely felt the kicks to my head and back and legs.

I was only dimly aware that they were laughing as they got back in the car and drove away. Through the waves of nausea I clung grimly to one thought. Don't forget the license number!

I'm not sure how long I was there before a passing motorist found me and called an ambulance, but by the time it arrived, my breathing was back to normal and I was feeling better. I lost the argument about whether or not I should ride into Emergency, but I did give the guys who'd showed up in the squad car the license number of Paco's latest vehicle, and I asked them to have Sergeant Perez give me a call.

At the hospital they did some more stitching on my head and told me I had two cracked ribs and numerous contusions. They remembered me from the last time so they didn't argue too long when I vetoed the suggestion that I accept their offer of a few days' room and board. I let them put a rib belt on me and got someone to place a call to Hank. By the time they finished splicing and wrapping me, he was waiting in the corridor. Perez hadn't called.

I left the nurses and interns shaking their heads as I shuffled carefully away, taking little baby steps. Hank would have helped me if I was afraid he'd jar me by accident and I

didn't need any more bumps. I was having all I could do to walk out of there with even a shred of dignity, and hanging on to someone else wasn't going to help my self-esteem.

Hank had brought the short wave receiver as planned, and once I had dragged myself painfully into the passenger seat, I turned it on and tuned it to the frequency Hank gave me. Nothing. There was a little white noise but no beep-beep.

"We'll have to cruise," Hank said. "They're out of range. Let's start by heading south."

"Why south?"

"Why not?"

He was right. I had no idea where they'd gone. One direction was as good as another. My big fear was that they had stolen the car and by now had abandoned it. Perez had told me that the gang apparently used some of the cars more than once. I was hoping this was one of them, and that they were still out cruising.

"So let's try south." I winced as the car lurched forward and tried to hold myself in a rigid, upright position to protect the ribs.

"For Chrissakes, take it easy, Hank. This isn't a jeep."

He glanced over and said, "I thought Marines were supposed to be tough." The derisive tone of voice didn't match the concerned expression in the

bloodhound eyes, and I noticed he eased the car carefully over the parking lot speed bump and out into the street.

"Only as tough as we have to be. Are you sure you know which way south is?"

He let that one pass, and we didn't talk much as I concentrated on the little box in front of me on the dashboard. We cruised south for four or five miles, then turned east. After a while I began to hear a very faint beep.

"I've got something but I can barely hear it. What now?"

Hank pounded the steering wheel in triumph.

"We got 'em! All it takes now is time. This kind of receiver isn't directional so we'll just have to keep driving where the signal is loudest until we spot the car."

It took some trial and error, but we finally narrowed it down to a neighborhood that hadn't been proud of itself for at least thirty years. The alleys were clogged with abandoned refrigerators and tattered, overstuffed furniture, and the stunted trees on the boulevards were dying for lack of water. The crumbling frame and stucco houses were desperate for paint, and the fences surrounding the junk strewn yards were broken and sagging.

As we cruised slowly down a street, the beeping became more

insistent, and halfway down the block we saw a yard full of renegade vehicles. There were cars and parts of cars filling the yard and overflowing onto the street. I spotted the Chevy in the driveway; across the yard was the green Volkswagen. There was a guy in the yard bent over the hood of a Pontiac, but from what I could see, he didn't look like Paco or either of his friends.

"Okay, Hank. Let's get to a phone."

Perez had finally received the message I'd left and was waiting for me to call. He'd also gotten my letter, so his attitude wavered between amused and irritated. He listened to the directions and told us to sit tight. We had to wait nearly an hour in the parking lot at the scroungy little market where we'd found the pay phone, but when they arrived, Perez and Bill Henderson had a search warrant and three black and white patrol cars with them. Perez wanted Hank and me to wait while they made the arrests, but I argued that there might be several guys in there and how would he know which ones to bust?

Perez was impatient. "If necessary, we'll take them all into custody on suspicion and sort them out at the station. That's

what the warrant is for. Now, you can either wait here or head back to the station and meet us there."

I was so sore I could barely get in and out of the car. If things got out of hand, I wouldn't be any help to anyone, and I just couldn't get enthusiastic over the thought of getting knocked down again. But still, I was the one who'd taken all the lumps, and I had no intention of missing the wrapup even if I had to do it as a spectator. I casually changed the subject. I said, "Sergeant, we have a portable black light in the trunk. Would you like to borrow it?"

Perez nodded and jerked a thumb at one of the uniforms. Hank opened the trunk and the light was transferred to one of the black and whites. The police conferred briefly and then drove away without sirens to approach the house from both ends of the street. Hank and I followed at a discreet distance.

We pulled into the curb one house away, beside one of the junky cars parked illegally on the sidewalk, and watched as Perez and his little task force swarmed over the house and yard. There was a lot of yelling and confusion, but no shots were fired. Suddenly, from our vantage point, we saw Paco climb out a side window and do a broken field run across the

cluttered yard through the battered cars to the street. He turned and started to sprint in our direction.

"He's getting away!" Hank started to reach for the horn but I grabbed his hand and said, "Wait!"

Paco never saw us. He aimed for the space between the car on the sidewalk and Hank's Oldsmobile, and then glanced back as he heard Perez bellow, "Hold it!"

He tried to speed up and looked around just in time to see me swing the big Olds door out to block his path. Paco hit the door with an impressive and satisfying impact. He was short enough so his head was snapped into the solid steel frame above the window. I craned my head around and watched with deep satisfaction as his eyes glazed and he crumpled to the ground with blood flowing from a gash above his eyebrow.

He struggled dazedly to his feet and leaned against the car, staring into the muzzle of Perez's .38 Police Special. Perez spun him around, stretched him out over the hood of the car, and patted him down. He removed a switchblade and was reaching for the handcuffs when Paco turned, eyes glittering with hate, and spat out a few words in Spanish. I don't know what

he said; it didn't look like he was trying to escape, but Perez casually swung the revolver in an arc and crashed it into the side of Paco's head.

One of the uniformed officers ran up with drawn gun and pointed it at the stupefied Paco sitting on the ground. Perez holstered his revolver, turned to the officer, and in a quaintly formal voice announced, "The beater of old persons seems to have injured himself. Cuff him and read him his rights, then run him down to Emergency."

Later at the station I identified Paco with his bandaged head and the two they called Miguel and Jorge. Then for my benefit Perez darkened the room and made them stick their hands under the black light. They all glowed with a spectacular lavender hue reminiscent of the fluorescence we used to see from troop carriers at night in the dark waters of the South Pacific. They'd gotten the powder on their faces and clothes and even in their hair. They couldn't think of a thing to explain the presence of all that glowing stuff. As we were leaving, Sergeant Perez stopped me.

"I see that the officers who took your report at the hospital this morning forgot to ask how much money was taken from you. How much was in that little baggie anyway?"

"How much did they have on them?"

"About eight hundred," Perez said, "and all of it has at least a trace of fluorescence."

I thought back to the three encounters and added silently. There was eighty-six bucks the first time, eighteen the second and three hundred this morning. But there was my cart and the groceries and whatever the hospital visits came to, not to mention the supplies and the bus trips and what the TV lawyers call pain and suffering. I looked Perez in the eye.

"I'm not sure of the exact amount, but it was almost my whole Social Security check. It was about eight hundred."

He looked at me out of those ancient, unsmiling eyes for a moment, then allowed the corner of his mouth to twitch.

"Well, like they say. What goes around comes around." The flat brown face looked almost cordial. "I'll see the D.A. and let you know how long he'll need the money for evidence. We should be able to get your eight hundred back to you before too long. But now I think you'd better get home and go to bed."

"Thanks, sergeant, but actually I'm feeling much better." I turned and placed a hand on Hank's shoulder. "I believe I'll take my buddy out and buy him that beer I promised him." I grinned. "After all, I've still got the seventeen dollars my friends overlooked."

Perez actually laughed. "How about the twenty in your shoe?"

I smiled. I was surprised at how good I was feeling.

"That too," I agreed. "If I can bend over far enough to get it."

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UNSOLVED

by Guy Savant

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the October issue.

The jury had admitted defeat—they were hung. Even the foreman, who had lobbied valiantly for the defendant's innocence, was resigned to the jury's failure to reach a unanimous decision. The press crowded the jurors to get their statements. What the press did not know was that some of the jurors always tell the truth and some always lie, while the foreman alternately tells the truth and lies. They also didn't know that twice as many Truthtellers as Liars found the defendant guilty, while only one more Liar than Truthteller found him innocent.

From the following statements given the press, can you determine who are the Truthtellers and who the Liars, each juror's verdict, and which juror was the foreman?

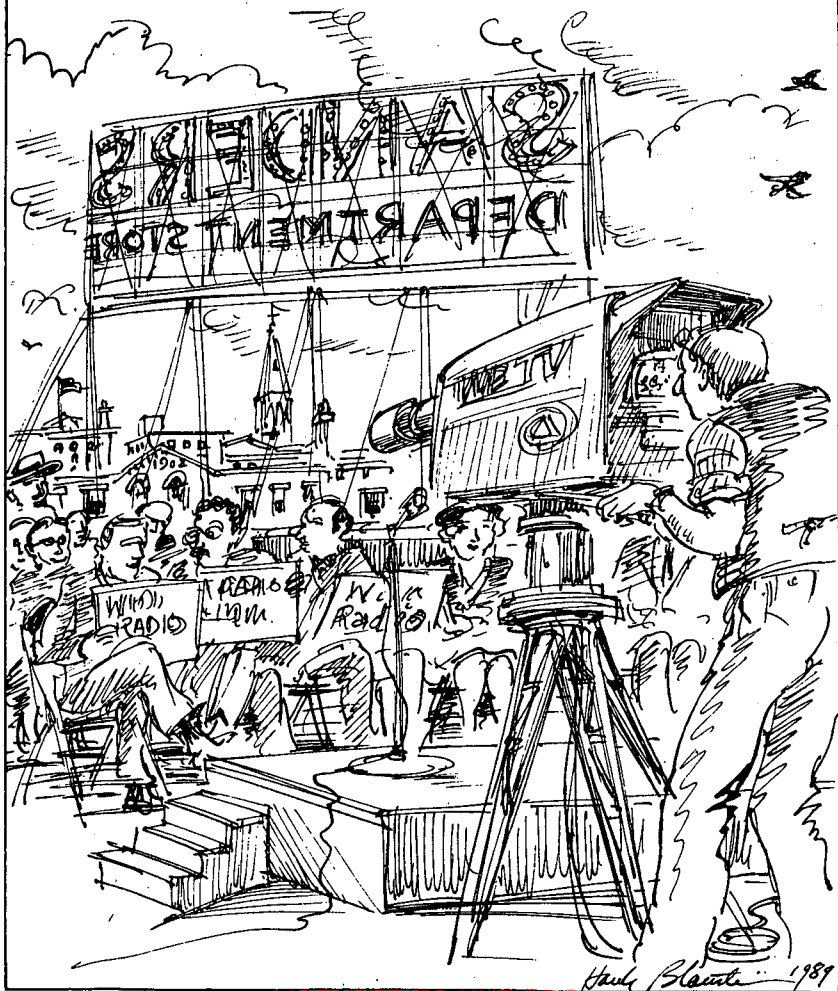
- #1: Juror #5 always lies. I thought the defendant was innocent.
- #2: Juror #8 always tells the truth. I disagreed with juror #11.
- #3: Juror #6 always tells the truth. I thought the guy was innocent.
- #4: Juror #7 is not the foreman. Juror #9 thought he was guilty.
- #5: Juror #11 always lies. I thought the defendant was guilty.
- #6: The foreman is not juror #10. I voted guilty.
- #7: Juror #2 always lies. I thought he was guilty.
- #8: Juror #9 will lie, as always. I thought he was guilty.
- #9: Juror #3 is the foreman. Juror #11 thought he was innocent.
- #10: Juror #12 always tells the truth. I thought he was guilty.
- #11: Juror #4 always tells the truth. Juror #3 thought he was guilty.
- #12: Juror #1 never lies. I found him guilty.

NOTE: For the purposes of this puzzle, juror #1 may or may not be the foreman. (Juror #1 often is so designated in real trials.)

FICTION

Charlie's Spring Break

by Allen M. Widem



Sure, somebody somewhere along the line in my business coined a phrase, something like wherever you go, there's radio, and promoted it to the nth degree, if memory serves.

That's fine, a catch-their-attention thing like that phrase, but when it's selling radio as an advertisers' outlet in an area where the big cheese is either television, piped in from a long way off, or the local gazette, it's something akin to yet another old, oft-used phrase, something like not advertising is like winking in the dark. Only person knows that any winking's actually going on is the person doing the winking.

Me? I've been in radio since I was twelve, and I'm a long ways, a long, long ways from twelve, I've got to admit straight off.

But radio and me, we're compatible. Thousand-watter like mine, don't owe a nickel at the bank on it, not now anyways, and the only thing that's shaken me up in a lot of years is, well, my experience back three months ago.

My son Charlie. That's what this is all about.

Now, I've told my wife Marge and I've told my wife Marge, more times than I can actually remember. Spoil the kid, spoil the man.

And with my son Charlie, I'm afraid, I let my wife Marge spoil him as a kid. That ruined Charlie as a man. At least, I'll say straight off, until three months ago.

With a fellow like me, I've always got to go around quoting things, or spouting hypothetical premises. Promoting.

That's because I own the radio station. I'm not alone. There's competition, one other fellow in town proper and, half an hour's drive-time downstate, a lot more.

What does all that have to do with my son Charlie?

My wife Marge she spoiled my son Charlie rotten, when he was a kid. He hated certain foods, and when I opened my mouth to tell her he'd better eat what you put on the table, honey, or tell him he'll starve, she'd come right back at me. Remind me about my mom. My mom, she'd always cook what I liked, and I kind of hinted at it when Marge and I got married. That was the first mistake in my marriage. Never tell your wife little things like that. They'll come back to haunt you.

Oh, I tried to get Charlie interested in radio. I mean, an only child and everything, I kind of felt, well, maybe he'd be lonely when he grew up, and Marge she came right back at me when I said something about

that. She said she'd been an only child, remember. And she was never lonely. Society editor at the local gazette when we met.

Anyway, there I was, back three months ago, having a gab session with Larry, Elton, and Gerard, they're my salespeople, and we were talking about Sanders Department Store.

Of course all three of my guys, they came out with very strong, sound suggestions. About being able to convince the whole Sanders family that going with radio promos, particularly with our station, why, they'd have to build an addition spanning ten blocks.

Like, for an example, Larry said we ought to get our morning drive-time host to broadcast from the front window of the department store. First time, for this town anyway.

Now, in big, big cities, drive-time means a jammed-up traffic situation from all directions.

In my town, it's more like waving a good morning to Frank and Jimmy and Gary, who're more or less permanent police at the main traffic arteries.

But broadcasting from the front window of Sanders Department Store? Bound to please. Especially the Sanders family.

Especially if Old Man Sanders and his three daughters

would go along with buying more time on my station. Then I'd be pleased, too.

Only in the middle of it all, Larry shook his head, said he'd been down to Boston as I'd asked him to, yammering away with our regional ad rep, and our regional ad rep, that's Herbie Meadows, he told Larry that he'd heard from a reliable source in Boston that television stations, not singular, but plural, had been sounding out Sanders Department Store's ad agency in Boston about that very thing. On-site broadcast.

"It's only a rumor," Larry assured me.

"A rumor's a rumor," I said.

"Should we check it out with the store?" Larry asked.

It was my turn to shake my head. "Not the smartest thing to do," I said. "Figure, you put an ounce of doubt into Mort Sanders' mind, you've put yourself on hold, you know?"

My three fine salesmen. They all nodded. Now I like a sales crew that goes along with me.

But the bottom fell out of my upbeat mood.

Ethel, who's my secretary and has been my secretary through five pregnancies, three husbands, and a mother going on eighty-seven who still insists that her little girl Ethel doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain, came into my

office right about then and said that my son Charlie was calling.

I knew what he wanted before he asked me. My son Charlie.

"Dad . . ." in that whining nasal I detest. I told my wife Marge she spoiled him rotten. Now coming back. Vacation week.

"Yes, Charlie," I said. I motioned with my free fingers. My three fine salesmen. They should stay put. In my office.

"Dad, I'm up in Burlington," Charlie said.

"And . . ." I said.

"And I need either a ride from here to home or some money wired here to get me home," he said. "It is my school break."

"And . . ." I said. With my son Charlie it's always something beyond the first request. For money, that is.

"Eleanor . . . you remember Eleanor?"

"I remember Eleanor," I assured my caller. "Isn't she the pride of every fraternity your campus has?"

"Dad . . ." That whining nasal. It gets to me. Even in my sleep, I can hear my son Charlie whining, whining. Marge, she spoiled him. I told her and I told her. Until three months ago.

"She wants to come home with me," Charlie told me. As if I hadn't expected it as soon

as I'd heard her name.

"You're in Burlington," I said. "You want to bring her home. Do you have any money left, Charlie?"

"Not exactly, Dad," he said. "She saw a coat, a beautiful coat in a store up here, and she said she'd pay me back when we got back to campus. Only, I'd like to come home, you know?"

"How much, Charlie?" I asked. I sighed, too. My three fine salesmen were fidgeting. They wanted to either get on with sales strategy, anent Sanders Department Store, or get out on the street and beat the pants off the local gazette and the local competition radio and the television stations downstate and not have to sit there and watch me listening to my son Charlie.

Charlie mentioned a figure. It figured. It meant he'd already gone through all the cash I'd given him the last time home, and I didn't even want to estimate in my mind how much Marge had given him without telling me. She spoiled him rotten.

Then he dropped the other shoe.

"Eleanor's broken up with Skip, Dad . . . You remember me telling you about Skip? He says they're not compatible. But he's here, too . . ."

"And . . ." I said.

"He says he'll drive us home

if I pay for the gas and expenses," he said.

I wanted to scream. Why? I wanted to ask. But I didn't. My son Charlie wanting to console his friend Eleanor, who's broken up with her boyfriend Skip, and Skip, he's there, too, only he won't budge without money.

"Can you wire me some money? Like now?"

"Now?" I asked. "Right now? Charlie, you ever stop to think I run a business here? You ever stop to think . . ."

He came right back at me. "If I call home, Dad," he said, "Mom'll get upset. You don't want Mom to get upset?"

"No!" I said it so loud I think I startled my three fine salesmen. They were twiddling their thumbs, or whatever salesmen anywhere in the world do while their boss is on the phone talking with a son who's intent on an ex-girlfriend not getting upset over her present boyfriend.

Of course I took care of wiring the money. I told Ethel to get cracking on it. And of course Ethel said she couldn't because her mother, who's going on eighty-seven, wants her, Ethel, to get right home because the cat, who's named Handy Andy, has taken off. I ended up wiring the money myself.

And by the time my three fine salesmen and I were back talking about Sanders Department Store, I had to head sales

of woe of campus concerns of their own children, and, that, of course, threw us off. I told my three fine salesmen that if, yes, if, Sanders, particularly Old Man Sanders, opted for television, we'd be in soup. I meant we'd be behind last year's sales figures, that's what I meant.

I called home. No answer. Figured. Marge plays bridge every single Tuesday, national holidays excluded. And that being the third Tuesday of the month, it had to be at her pal Hazel Martin's and I didn't want to call over there. Hazel Martin's husband Jonathan, he'd signed a long-term contract with my competition radio station for his hardware store. Biggest one in town. The store. Not the contract.

I went to the Chamber of Commerce Tuesday luncheon at the Bradford Hotel and who did I spot as soon as I walked into the lobby? None other than Old Man Sanders, who grabbed my arm and said he was thinking of me and of course I gave him my prime-time smile, and he smiled and *he* dropped the other shoe.

"Guess what I've gone and done, Fred?" he asked, standing there rocking back and forth on his heels, like a cherub out to charm the world.

I shook my head. My mind was on my son Charlie. Spending my money like confetti, be-

friending an ex-girlfriend because her boyfriend was being somewhat ungentlemanly.

Old Man Sanders pinched my arm. I wanted to pinch his. I didn't. He still might sign an ad contract with me.

"Yes, Mort," I said. He wanted to be coaxed, I figured. I was right. He smiled even more.

"I'm going to have a television program from the roof of the store, Fred," he chirped. "How do you like them apples?"

"From the roof?" I asked, pulling back from his grasp.

"From the roof," he repeated. "They're coming up from Manchester, Fred. How do you like the tide coming in?"

"The tide . . ." I said numbly. My son, en route home, paying a fellow college student to drive him.

Old Man Sanders turned away. He'd spotted His Honor, our three-term mayor. Wanted to tell him, too.

"Mort," I said in a half-whisper. "You'd like us to do something, too . . . from the roof?"

"Nonsense, Fred!" he said with a lot of enthusiasm. "I don't need you. You need me. Imagine, the first time this town's had a rooftop television program! You owe your listeners a remote broadcast."

"I do?" I felt like I'd been kicked and then kicked again. I'd thought, yes, thought we'd air programming from his front

window. I'd never thought about the roof.

"Indeed," he purred. "I've already called your competition down the street. He's going to."

"He is?"

"He is. And the paper's doing page one, Fred."

"It is? Mort . . ." I lowered my voice. The mayor, probably slapping backs, punching shoulders for a fourth term, was heading our way. He gave the competition two-thirds of his ad budget last November. "You could do with more radio spots, Mort." I winked. Knowingly.

"You think?" he asked, eyebrows arched.

"I think," I responded, eyebrows arched.

We heard a land development company expound on the merits of expanding our tiny airport's space during lunch. I was sitting at a table with two sixty-second spot buyers (supermarket and super-giant gasoline service station) and all I wanted to do was to get back to the station, determine what my three fine salesmen were going to be able to do to make up for the probable loss of Sanders Department Store ad revenue. No way would Old Man Sanders buy a bundle of television time *and* radio spots at the same time.

I left the hotel lobby figuring I'd walk back to the radio station, only three blocks up Main,

but when I came out to the street, I was greeted by a downpour, and I debated for all of a minute. One, I dash up Main, or, two, better, I wait in the lobby and get a ride back to the radio station, preferably with a prospective sixty-second spot buyer. I mean, Old Man Sanders, he was ditching me. I knew it. He knew it. We both knew it.

As soon as I was back in the lobby, His Honor, our three-term mayor, he waved to me and I waved to him, and I told myself he spent two-thirds with the guys cross-town, not much with me, so, hey, let him wave, you know.

"Fred," His Honor said as he came up to me. "You left two seconds before a phone-call page was sounded for you. Call home. That's what I heard."

I called home.

My wife Marge, she was home. Now what?

"Charlie's on his way, honey," she told me.

"I know, I know," I told her.

"He's bringing that wonderful girl, what's her name, Eleanor, here!" she told me.

"I know, I know," I told her.

"Charlie said he's spoken with you," she said. "He's getting a ride with that wonderful fellow, Richard Bainbridge, and isn't that nice of that Bainbridge boy!"

I didn't have the guts to tell her. About the money being wired. About that wonderful, wonderful what's-his-name getting money for driving Charlie home. "That's nice," I managed to mumble. "That's very nice, Marge."

I awoke the next morning before dawn. I slipped off our bed, got dressed, and went downstairs, figuring I'd have some breakfast before going into the office. I didn't want to awaken my wife Marge, and I most certainly didn't want to awaken my son Charlie or his two guests. We've got a big house. It was my grandpa's and then it was my dad's.

All I wanted to do, bluntly, was to sit at the kitchen table, have some instant coffee, and do some scribbling in pencil on a yellow legal pad. Figure out my options. I'm losing Sanders to the more, quote, unquote, glamorous atmosphere of television. How do I make up the sales gap? How?

Only I get downstairs, and who's sitting at the kitchen table but Skip, I beg pardon, Richard Bainbridge, that wonderful fellow. He's gone ahead and served himself two of the best steaks we've got in the freezer.

"Well, hi!" He greeted me with that.

"Well, hi!" I said in return.

"Care for steak, Mr. Collins?" he asked.

"Do you always have steak for breakfast?" I asked.

He smiled, went to work with fork and knife. He seemed to be enjoying himself. "You see," he said, almost to himself, "I prefer morning. Don't you?"

I shrugged. What I didn't need, at five in the morning of a day when I needed, really and truly, a couple of big ad accounts, was the sight of a guest of my son Charlie's eating like nobody's business.

I wanted to ignore him. I didn't want to call him Skip, and I didn't want to call him Richard either. I wanted to call him names. Of all the nerve, charging my son Charlie for bringing him home and then staying as a guest!

I kept my cool, as Charlie would say. I didn't insult this Skip. I smiled, poured some instant coffee into a cup, heated some water, and before I could sit down again, our guest said, well, yes, he'd like a cup of coffee too, and I wanted to punch him good then.

"Of course," I said. "The instant coffee's in the jar marked Instant Coffee, and that's a pot over there, and that's a kettle over there. Either one can heat water. Just punch a button on the stove." And with that I was out the door, en route to radio.

Wherever you go, there's . . .

I hadn't been at my desk at the station for five seconds before the phone rang. I knew Ethel wouldn't be coming in. Wednesday. She and her mom, it's a habit. Food shopping, first thing every Wednesday. Her mom, going on eighty-seven, wants to be sure Ethel shops for nutritious food. Has to learn, her mom insists.

I half expected one of my three fine salesmen to be calling in from wherever they were selling.

It was Marge, and she was crying. "I can't find my dress wedding ring, Fred," she said in a rush of words. Around the family Marge has a habit of wearing a very thin wedding ring, but when company comes, she gets out her very expensive ring.

I got flustered. "Well, er," I muttered.

"And, Fred," she plunged on. "Did you take out something or put in something? My purse, it's on my bureau and it's open. You know I always put it away at night."

"No, Marge," I told her. "I didn't even notice . . ."

"You're always so tied up with that radio station!" she cried.

"Please, Marge," I said. "I've got a lot of immediate problems to attend to . . ."

"You never have time for family matters," she wailed. "Could you come home and help me look?"

"Marge," I pleaded. "I've lost one of my biggest advertising accounts. Honest. Sanders Department Store . . ."

"Oh, Sanders," Marge said, the crying suddenly stopped. "That's where Charlie and Eleanor and that wonderful fellow they brought along with them are going. They're going to watch a television show. It's all over the television, Fred, my goodness gracious. Doesn't your news person tell you anything?"

"Marge!" It was my turn to punch the panic button. I'd just tapped my right rear trousers pocket. My wallet. It wasn't there. "I . . ." I managed to sputter.

"Yes!" she came right back. "You thought of where my dress ring is, you darling Fred!"

"No, Marge," I blurted. "I didn't. My wallet . . . I don't have my wallet. And I wondered . . ."

I told her of the morning episode. Skip, slash Richard, slash freeloader, eating two steaks, two, not one, at five in the morning. I stopped to catch my breath. "And you know what else, Marge? *He* charged our son Charlie for the ride from Burlington to our home. Did you know that?"

"I wouldn't have known," Marge said. "And the kitchen was spic and span when I came downstairs."

I had had it with the day and it was still morning. I asked Marge how Charlie and his, quote, unquote, guests, intended to watch the television show on the roof of Sanders Department Store.

"Oh, pooh!" my wife said. "That fellow Richard, *he* said he heard on the radio in the kitchen . . ."

By then I'd really had it with the day. "What did he hear on the radio in the kitchen?" I asked. I shouldn't have asked. I knew what she was going to say.

"Your competition, cross-town, they've got a new news program, half past five in the morning . . . Oh, I'm sorry, you probably know that. But they said the first fifty people showing up at the store's employee entrance by one o'clock'll be able to see the television show. Isn't that something, Fred?"

I went downstairs, sought out my three fine salesmen, sitting in their usual booth in the usual coffee shop, drinking coffee and playing poker. Of course I didn't get into the game. I sat down, uninvited though I was (I've never learned how to play poker), and I said we've got to do something about the competition cross-town.

My three fine salesmen looked at each other, put down their cards. Larry suggested that, perhaps, just perhaps, the Boss, that's me, ought to show up at the department store, hold up a big card, something, with our station's call letters. That'd be a smart thing to do.

"I've got a better idea," I said. "We'll *all* show up."

My town's never had a television station, never will, and the scheduling of a "live" show from the rooftop of the biggest department store? Well, by a quarter to one o'clock, when we four—my three fine salesmen and I—showed, the line was down the block on Main, way down the block and still extending, and I murmured something about going through the store's front entrance, with our placards, of course, up the elevator, that route. We did.

The roof was all lighted up, and even though it was cloudy, with a promise of rain, the occasion seemed festive. Mort Sanders saw us four approaching, placards in hand, and he greeted me like a long lost cousin, and he invited us to sit in the very first row. I swallowed hard on that. He put us next to the owner of my competition cross-town and then waddled away.

Like I've said, I've been in radio all my life. But the new breed, the three-piece suits, the

super-polished shoes, the whole bit, it kind of gnaws at my gut. The competition, he'll tell anybody and everybody he's got a master's degree and then asks if you have one, too. That kind of smugness. Gets me in the gut.

"Well, well, well," he said, grinning like a cat that knows where the restaurant is located in a desert. "What're you doing here, Freddie?"

I nodded, winked at my three fine salesmen, and said, "Checking the television people, Chambers," I said. "We might buy 'em out." He blinked at that. I knew he would.

My son Charlie spotted me and he came over and said he had something to say, in private, and we went over to an uncluttered corner of the roof and he said he didn't think, but he was wondering, just the same. Did I come into his room in the night and take the ten bucks he had on the bureau? I said no. I studied the placard in my hand.

"Dad . . ." He wasn't whining. A plus for him. For the day, anyway. "Mom told me. About her dress ring. About her purse."

"Yes," I said. "Charlie, I think I've lost my wallet, too."

Charlie patted me on the shoulder. A first-time-ever for him. "I'll have to tell Eleanor and I'll have to tell Skip, Dad. I mean, I've got to."

"Yes."

"I don't want to think what I'm thinking."

"No."

"But I've got to ask them."

"Yes."

"Do you think I can't?"

"No."

"Then I'll ask them, Dad."

"Yes."

We both swirled. Coming out on the roof was a band, the musicians coming through, one by one, an oompahpahpah on the drums. I blanched. One was a Skip/Richard Bainbridge look-alike. I looked over at where Eleanor and Skip/Richard Bainbridge had been sitting. She was there. He was there. So this, this had to be a coincidence, right?

I walked with Charlie over to where Eleanor and Skip/Richard Bainbridge were sitting. I motioned to Skip/Richard Bainbridge to follow us. We walked off the roof to the top sales floor and leaned against a wall, out of the way of people moving to and fro.

"Skip," my son Charlie said right away, "there's something a bit off base, you know. I mean, you here, and somebody looking like you, you know . . ."

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" he asked, making slits of his eyes, putting a sneer on his lips.

"Well, yeah," Charlie retorted. "I'm thinking what you're thinking . . ."

"You seen my brother up there?" He pointed to the ceiling.

"Yeah," Charlie said.

"It is my brother," Skip said.

"He looks like me. We're twins."

"Yeah," Charlie said.

I got into the act. I mean I got to speak. "Something's missing, Bainbridge," I said. "You know?" I figured that was all-inclusive.

"Well, you see," Skip said, "I called him. On your kitchen phone. Six this morning." He seemed pleased about that. "Over in Boston. I said, 'Stan . . . ' That's his name, he's my twin, I told him to come up as fast as he could. Getting into the band was easy. He said he was willing to do anything, only to be seen on television."

"Oh," I said.

"Oh," Charlie said.

"Look," I said.

"At what?" Skip asked.

"Understand," I said.

"What?" Skip asked.

"There's my wife's ring, it's missing. There's money from my son Charlie's room, it's missing." I tapped my right rear trouser pocket. "And my wallet, it's missing."

"Oh," he said.

"Yes," I said.

"What do you want me to do about it?" he asked.

I leaned my placard against the wall. I was tired of holding it. I was tired of the day. Only one in the afternoon. "I'd like

you to do some explaining," I finally said. "After all . . ."

The door leading to the roof opened and closed behind us. I turned. Charlie turned. Skip turned.

Coming along the corridor: Mort Sanders, a uniformed police officer, the latter holding onto Eleanor's arm.

Eleanor made the officer stop. Mort Sanders stopped too, of course. "Oh, Charlie! Charlie! Charlie!" Eleanor cried.

"Oh, Eleanor!" Charlie cried.

"Here you are, Collins!" Mort Sanders cried.

"Yes," I said, holding my placard closer. He wasn't going to make me get rid of my placard.

Mort Sanders nodded towards Eleanor, scowled. "You know what your son's guest here went and did, Collins? She says she's your son's guest. Do you say she's your son's guest?"

"Yes!" Charlie cried. "Oh, yes! Oh, Eleanor!"

"Oh, Charlie!" she said in

turn. Skip, he said nothing. He just shook his head. Me, I said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"*She* grabbed my wallet, that's what *she* did!" Mort Sanders shouted.

By now the corridor was jam-packed. Gapers, whatever.

"You know what else she did?" Mort Sanders stormed.

I shook my head. I held onto my placard. Closer. Tighter.

"Her shoulder bag, it spilled when she started to take off . . . There's wallets, there's more! *Your* guest?"

Then, suddenly, there was a television camera looking straight at us. I paid attention to business. I handed the placard to Charlie. He held it aloft. My station call letters on TV!

In that fleeting moment, I changed my mind about Charlie. Such poise, such professionalism! Not a spoiled kid. Never. A man of whom broadcasting will hear . . . My son, a man.

(continued from page 2)

the Malice Domestic sleuth has no professional business sticking his or her nose into the plot, so that "setting up the delicate scenario that compels a rather mundane hero or heroine to investigate without calling in the authorities is the hallmark of the genre."

That's all well and good, but though we seem to recognize a Malice Domestic book when we read it ("It sends me searching for a quiet corner and an overstuffed chair," writes Mary Morman), practitioners and fans alike are still in search of a pithy definition. An informal contest was held during the convention, with less than satisfying results. People kept finding themselves defining a Malice Domestic novel by itemizing ingredients it lacks, values it spurns, and situations it avoids. The tried-and-true term of "cosy" is dear to the hearts of some, but not to others. Any ideas out there?

At any rate, the best reason to hold a mystery fan convention of any sort is to have a ball, and this group certainly did that. Registration closed at three hundred people, a group small enough to allow for cosy (oops, that word again!) panel discussions with lots of time for audience questions. We were thrown together at planned events, only to run into one another waiting for the hotel el-

evator, relaxing in the bar, standing in line for the high tea that closed the weekend.

I paid for a dealer's table, then proceeded to leave it unmanned (unwomaned?) for much of the time. Why should I miss out on panels titled "What's So Funny About Murder?" (Dorothy Cannell, Carolyn G. Hart, Joan Hess), or "Christie Revisited" (Robert Barnard's lively discussion of Dame Agatha's style)? "Playing Fair" (Marion Babson, Sarah Caudwell, Aaron Elkins, and Patricia Moyes) was opposite the panel on humor in the mystery; while Charlotte MacLeod's "Graphology and Crime" ran against one conducted by the Fan Guest of Honor, Ellen Nehr, a lady who proved herself to be a very funny speaker that night at the awards banquet. Other authors sitting on panels, signing books, and hobnobbing with fans at the cocktail party, the banquet, and the High Tea included Lia Matera, Mary Monica Pulver, Sharyn McCrumb, Caroline Crane, Mary Higgins Clark, P.M. Carlson, Simon Brett, Susan Dunlap, Nancy Pickard, Elaine Racho Chase, Dorothy Sucher, Margaret Maron, Alice Storey, Marylys Millhiser, and the Guest of Honor, Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels. Elizabeth/Barbara, Charlotte MacLeod, and Mary Higgins Clark told some very amusing anecdotes about author tours

on a panel Saturday afternoon. That evening Elizabeth/Barbara gave a riotously funny dinner speech, following a witty introduction by Toastmaster Robert Barnard. One left the banquet table convinced that many of our best-loved mystery authors could successfully go undercover disguised as stand-up comedians and comediennes. The laughter added to the fun, no doubt about that.

Agatha Christie had been dubbed Ghost of Honor, and her presence was much felt. On Saturday afternoon contestants whirled around the hotel on the trail of clues as part of the Agatha Christie Treasure Hunt, primarily perpetrated by Carolyn G. Hart. That evening Carolyn accepted an Agatha for the absent Elizabeth George, who won Best First Novel for *A Great Deliverance*. Minutes later she found herself back at the microphone accepting her very own Agatha for Best Novel, awarded to *Something Wicked*. Authors up for the short story prize were Elizabeth Byrd, P.M. Carlson, Mary Higgins Clark, Ralph McInerny (for "The Dutiful Son," AHMM, May 1988), and Robert Barnard, who won with "More Final Than Divorce" (EQMM, October 1988). The Agatha turned out to be a very sturdy, homely, and roomy teapot, the perfect symbol for

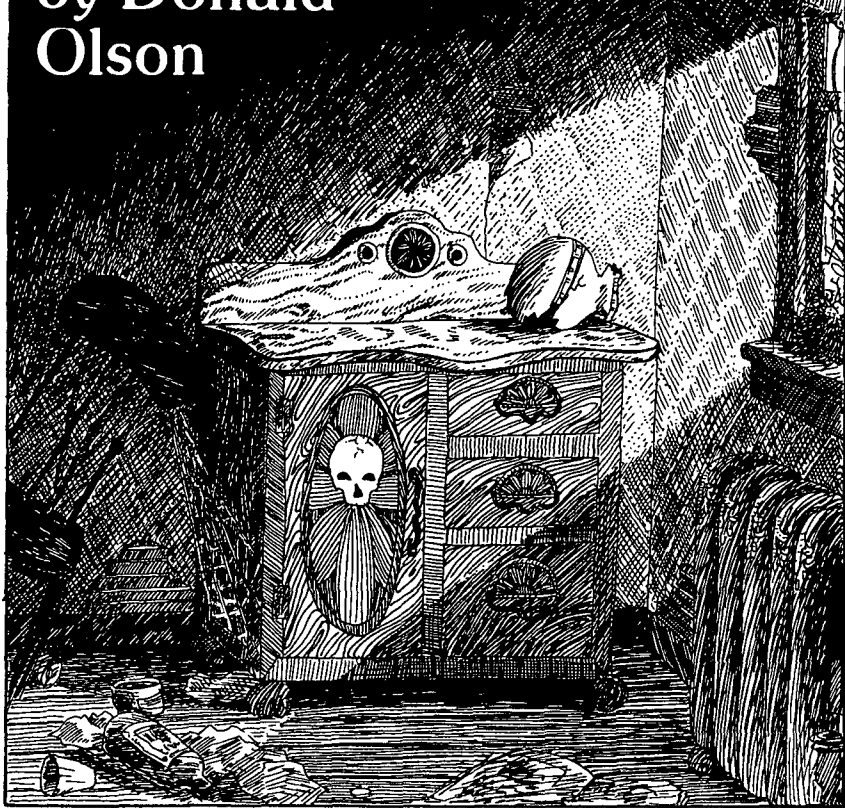
the mysteries which, as Dorothy Cannell described them, "make murder a comfortable business" for the reader.

Having a convention called Malice Domestic allowed its organizers to dub the meeting rooms after the spots in a Clue game, with a few nooks from the traditional English mansion to round out the scene. Who else could wind up a convention with an Agatha Christie High Tea, complete with heated teapots and ladies pouring, and plates piled high with dainty cucumber sandwiches and scones with clotted cream and crumpets (I think). Where else could you don your vintage clothing and come dressed in Victorian "whites," twenties flapper dresses, or forties vamp suits? Charlotte MacLeod had some real competition in the hat arena, let me tell you.

And so the "cosy" or whatever we choose to call it is alive and well; that was evident by the end of Malice Domestic. I was relieved to hear it as you no doubt are, too. It was a swell party; too bad you missed it. You wouldn't want to take a peek at a few snapshots, would you? You would? Here's Marion Babson and me right after the banquet. Don't you love her blue blouse? And—oh, this one was taken when we were in the tea line with Mary Higgins Clark, who confided. . . .

Deceiving Appearances

by Donald
Olson



They came away from the auction in North Harmony with a set of oak spindlebacks and a Rayo lamp, hardly worth the time and expense. The trip had been Bunk's idea and Letty had offered only

token resistance. Bunk did have an instinct and the listing had sounded fairly promising; even if Letty deplored the craze for oak she knew it paid the lease on the shop. And now it appeared they'd taken the wrong

road despite Bunk's assurance that it was a shortcut to the expressway.

"Darling, I'm afraid *all* your instincts were out to lunch today," she teased him.

"Eat your words, lady. Doesn't that sign up ahead point to Route 62?"

"You lucked out, admit it."

They were still on the dirt road when the house came into view, a once charming Tuscan-style brick farmhouse in an advanced state of decay, the lawn a wilderness of unmown grass, nettles, and scraggly lilac, the outbuildings mere heaps of weatherbeaten lumber.

"I could cry," said Letty, admiring the once-proud relic. To be able to buy such a place and restore it ranked high on her dream agenda; the flat above the shop was convenient, but not for a lifetime.

"Care to explore?" Bunk asked, knowing what her answer would be. He slowed and turned into the rutted drive. The only other house in sight stood on a rise about an eighth of a mile away. The wind, gusting across the open countryside, tossed Letty's light blonde hair and rattled the slate shingles on the sagging roof. No signs warned against trespassers, the house was plainly abandoned, most of its windows broken, the fanlighted front door hanging ajar on rusted hinges.

As Letty followed Bunk over the threshold she wrinkled her nose at the sour stench of decay.

"Flophouse for hoboes," said Bunk, stepping around a stained mattress and litter of wine bottles. "Surprised someone hasn't torched it."

They found the usual disheartening clutter of worthless, damaged furniture and household detritus, melancholy remnants of long-vanished occupants. Venturing up the rickety staircase, Bunk presently called down to Letty: "Come on up here, but watch your step. You won't believe this."

In one of the bedrooms he'd discovered a late Victorian marble-topped washstand, its age-blackened varnish not concealing from Letty's trained eye the underlying burled walnut veneer on the drawers. It even had all its original brass drawer pulls. Refinished, it would command a tidy price in any antique shop.

"Funny some scavenger hasn't cabbaged onto it," murmured Letty, running her palm over the grimy white marble top.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?"

She knew exactly what he was thinking. "Bunk, we couldn't."

"Why the hell not? Place is obviously abandoned. Fair pickings."

It was not the first time in

the seven years of their marriage that Bunk had demonstrated a flexibility of scruples, if only by a tendency to take the occasional unfair advantage of a customer. Evidence not so much of a weakness of character, perhaps, as of the overconfidence that often comes with charm and good looks.

When she still hesitated he grinned and said, "We're not stealing it, love, we're rescuing it."

Five minutes later, the washstand stowed in the station wagon, they were on their way home.

Two days later, Bunk was in the workroom stripping the washstand when two policemen entered the shop. That they were not customers became quickly apparent to Letty. They asked if Bernard Talcott was there, and when Bunk appeared, one of the officers inquired if he owned a Ford LTD wagon and read a license number from his pad. Bunk said, yes, he did, but hadn't been in any accidents.

"Mr. Talcott, you were seen removing a piece of furniture from a house on Rockstream Road in the town of Harmony two days ago. We have a warrant to search these premises."

After examining the washstand, he turned to Bunk and

said impassively, "I'm afraid you'll have to come with us, sir."

"You must be kidding," Bunk protested. "I didn't *steal* the piece. The house was abandoned. There was no break-in."

"That's not for us to determine."

Bunk turned to Letty who had remained silent, as if too stunned to grasp what was happening. "You'd better call Dawkins. He can soon set things straight."

Edward Dawkins was the lawyer who had negotiated their lease for the shop. When Letty called him as soon as Bunk had been taken away in the patrol car, Dawkins promised to meet Bunk at the police station. Letty closed the shop, climbed the stairs, and went through the motions of preparing dinner, scarcely hopeful that Bunk would return before it turned cold, or would, for that matter, be allowed to return at all.

As it happened, not more than an hour had passed before she heard him on the stairs. He appeared shaken but managed a pale smile as he embraced her.

"Dawkins posted bail for me. I'll be arraigned in the morning."

"Arraigned! For what?"

"Would you believe burglary?"

"Oh, Bunk, *no*."

"That's a felony, love. If the witness had got a good look at you, they'd probably have arrested us both. It seems the owner had paid this guy down the road to keep a close eye on the place."

"The house was *abandoned*. Didn't you tell them—"

"Uninhabited, it would seem, not abandoned. It's owned by an Isobel Brendt who lives in Lakeside Heights. Old family property."

For a moment the name seemed to leave Letty dumb with astonishment; she stared at Bunk almost as if she couldn't have heard him right. "Brendt . . . ? Didn't you appraise some silver for someone named Brendt about a year ago? Didn't they live in Lakeside Heights?"

He nodded, said it must be the same couple. He drew her down beside him on the sofa. "God, what a mess. I'm sorry, love. I should have listened to you."

"But surely they won't *do* anything. Once they know the circumstances and that we're reputable business people with a clean record."

"Darling, I'm charged with a *felony*. I could go to jail."

"So what are we going to do?"

"That's up to Dawkins. Preliminary hearing's next week."

"But the Brendts know

you—at least they've met you. They know you're not a crook. What sort of man is Brendt?"

Bunk shrugged. "Seemed likable enough at the time. But it's his wife who's bringing the charges. I only met her briefly."

"And did she seem—likable?"

"Enough to drop the charges, you mean?" He didn't look hopeful. "We could appeal to them, I suppose. Not sure Dawkins would approve."

"Dawkins is not in trouble. You are."

He studied her face. "Phoning them might not help. Look, maybe if you talked to her, woman to woman. She'd only have to look at you to know you're not capable of doing anything wrong."

This wasn't quite what she'd had in mind. "You mean go and see her, by myself?"

"Better than both of us bargaining in, don't you think?"

Lakeside Heights was an affluent suburb north of the city, the Brendt house typical of its neighbors, a small Tudor-style mansion set in expensively landscaped grounds.

"I know I should have phoned first," Letty nervously explained. "I was afraid if I did you might refuse to see me."

Bunk had failed to mention that Isobel Brendt was a daunt-

ingly attractive woman, a leggy brunette with that overall appearance of manicured perfection that only money could achieve. Learning the purpose of Letty's visit did not affect her air of cultivated boredom.

"Why should I refuse to see you?"

"Well, under the circumstances — Mrs. Brendt, you've met my husband. You must know he's not a criminal. He doesn't go around burglarizing houses. He—"

"Are you saying it was not your husband who entered my property on Rockstream Road and removed a valuable piece of furniture?"

Letty's voice faltered, seemed close to breaking. "No, I'm afraid I can't say that." She went on to explain precisely what had occurred, admitting it was a foolish thing to have done but insisting they'd truly believed the property was abandoned and felt it a shame to leave a fine piece of furniture to the mercy of vandals. They had acted impulsively, but not with criminal intent.

Idly lighting a cigarette, Isobel Brendt listened to this plea without betraying any more emotion than if Letty had called to solicit a donation for some charity. When she finally spoke, it was with the same air of bored indifference.

"What you're asking, I assume, is that I drop the charges."

"Please. We'd be eternally grateful. You must see that something like this could easily ruin our business, to say nothing of what it might mean for Bunk. We'd be happy to make any kind of compensation you asked."

Isobel Brendt dismissed this notion with an airy wave of her cigarette. "Mrs. Talcott, I'm going to be quite honest with you. Frankly, I don't care a fig for that tatty old washstand. Nor do I wish to make trouble for you or your husband. Still, one can't simply shut one's eyes to illegal acts. Not in this age of rape and pillage. However. An idea came into my head as you talked. Call it crazy, but it may be possible you and I might do each other a favor. What are you, a size ten?"

This extraordinary question left Letty speechless.

Isobel Brendt's smile acquired a sudden warmth. "Very well. Before the preliminary hearing I shall instruct my lawyer to withdraw the charges against your husband. On one condition."

Before Letty could respond, the other woman held up a warning hand. "You may be appalled by what I'm going to propose. You see, I'm in danger of being divorced by my hus-

band. I don't want a divorce. I'm very well satisfied with my life here. Arthur suspects I have a lover. He's right. I do. A man I'm very much in love with. So far we've been lucky, but I have a strong suspicion Arthur has hired a private detective to keep tabs on me. I haven't dared meet my friend since. I don't even dare phone him. And there are things it's essential we talk about. Do you understand my predicament?"

Letty slowly nodded, wondering where all this was leading.

"Yes, I'm sure you do, Mrs. Talcott. Just as I understand yours. Now, I must see my friend. I absolutely must. But if I leave the house I'm sure to be followed. Sorry if all this sounds like third-rate soap opera, but I'm sure my idea will work, with a little careful planning . . ."

A half hour later they were just two of the girls, or so Isobel Brendt tried to imply as she insisted they toast their agreement in sherry, which by then Letty felt in no state of mind to refuse.

"Word of caution, Letty, dear. Not a peep to your lawyer or anyone else but your husband. This is our little secret."

"I'm not likely to advertise collusion," retorted Letty.

"Good. Just so we understand each other. Oh, one more little

favor before you go. Would you be a dear and give me your professional opinion of an old pair of candlesticks I picked up the other day? I was probably swindled, but I couldn't resist them. I have a thing about silver."

She returned from the dining room with a heavy candlestick which Letty examined carefully before declaring it to be Georgian and very valuable. Isobel Brendt laughed. "You mean for once my mean old Arthur can't accuse me of wanton extravagance?"

Bunk was preparing to open the shop a few days later when Letty, feeling as self-conscious as a green actress auditioning for a major role, came down and struck a pose at the foot of the stairs.

"Well, what do you think?"

Bunk stared. "My God, I don't believe it."

"If you were a detective would you be fooled?"

"Honey, you'd fool even the damn woman's husband. I saw her only that once but with that wig and those dark glasses—perfect."

"I wonder what it's like driving a Jaguar."

His face clouded. "I still don't like it. Embroiling yourself in this dame's domestic troubles

—could be awfully sticky.”

“Would you rather I were getting dolled up to visit you in jail?”

“It wouldn’t come to that. Dawkins assured me I’d probably draw a suspended sentence with probation.”

“Thank God that’s not a chance we’ll have to take.”

Timing was an essential factor in Isobel Brendt’s stratagem, and with this in mind Letty left the shop at precisely ten o’clock for the twenty minute drive to Millrace Mall. There she parked the station wagon outside the Sears entrance and walked through the concourse to the ladies’ lounge at the far end. This early on a weekday morning there were few shoppers, the restroom empty. She had dawdled in front of the mirror for less than ten minutes when Isobel Brendt came in, making sure they were alone before greeting Letty with a conspiratorial chuckle as she removed her dark glasses and studied Letty’s face in the mirror.

“A spot more rouge, maybe. You look too pale.”

“Were you followed?”

“I have to assume I was. I didn’t try to make sure, and you mustn’t either. I mean, don’t keep looking around. Act normal. You parked outside Sears? Good. The Jag’s opposite Car-

lisle’s entrance. You can’t miss it.”

“I just hope I can drive it.”

“Not to worry. Just remember you’re behind a very powerful engine. Okay, let’s do it.”

They stepped into adjoining cubicles, silently disrobed and passed their outer garments and shoes over the partition. No one came in while they made the change.

Isobel Brendt regarded their images in the mirror, then made a thumbs up sign as they exchanged handbags.

“You remember what to do.”

“Yes.”

Letty pushed open the door and slowly retraced her steps down the length of the concourse, idling before several store windows while betraying no hint of being a woman who thought she was being followed, playing the game precisely as Isobel Brendt had instructed. She bought some eye shadow in a department store and then wandered through Carlisle’s and out into the parking lot. Only when she’d found the Jaguar, started the engine, and cautiously accelerated, did her nerves begin to settle. She was a good driver and even in the heavy downtown traffic found the car easy to handle.

It amused her to think of how Bunk would have enjoyed play-

ing such a role. To him it would be an exciting lark, a game, even more exhilarating if it had held any element of risk. The discovery of the washstand typified the difference in their attitudes. She knew that Bunk had regarded it, quite literally, as a "steal," a source of quick profit. Antiques were purely a commodity to him, he didn't share Letty's genuine love of old things. When she had agreed to "rescue" the washstand, it was because she truly deplored the thought of its being vandalized or left to rot.

Downtown, she stopped at a hotel coffee shop where she whiled away twenty minutes, following Isobel Brendt's instructions that she occupy an inconspicuous booth. From there she drove to the public library, browsed among the stacks for another forty-five minutes, chose a couple of books at random and checked them out using Isobel Brendt's library card. The Art Institute a few blocks away was her next stop. She walked there at a brisk pace, not once looking behind her. After wandering through the galleries for nearly an hour she bought a postcard in the gift shop, again following Isobel Brendt's instructions.

Only once did she depart from the strict itinerary laid out for her by the woman she was im-

personating. On her way back to the car, she entered one of the side streets leading into Montgomery Square and stopped to examine the objects in the window of a somewhat dingy antique shop where in the past she had picked up an occasional bargain. An eighteenth century print of a Swiss grenadier was still on display. Bunk collected old prints depicting military subjects. With a quick glance at her watch she opened the door and entered the shop.

From the shop she strolled back to the car and drove to a gas station where she had the oil checked and the tank filled, paying the attendant with one of Isobel Brendt's credit cards. By then it was time to return to the mall where she parked the Jaguar in a spot only a few spaces from where she had started out. In Carlisle's she took the escalator to the third floor restaurant and in its tea-roomy atmosphere relaxed over a leisurely lunch of quiche Lorraine and spinach salad, trying to persuade her conscience that she'd done what had to be done, that she'd been given no choice.

At three o'clock she returned to the restroom where she found Isobel Brendt rinsing her hands at one of the washbowls. "It's okay," she said. "No one else here. Any trouble?"

"No. Funny, but I could swear I wasn't being followed."

"Proves how good the guy is."

"You met your friend?"

"Yes. God, what heaven to make love without wondering if we were being spied on. Come on, let's change."

Only when they were ready to leave did another woman come in. Isobel Brendt gave Letty's hand a quick squeeze. "Thanks for everything. If I don't see you again, good luck and all that."

"Same to you."

Isobel Brendt slipped on her dark glasses, opened the door, and walked out.

Dinner was special that night. Candlelight and champagne, and later Bunk went downstairs to put the final coat of varnish on a plantation desk which had to be delivered to a customer before the weekend. Letty turned on the seven o'clock news and started clearing the table. Minutes later she was flying down the stairs.

"Bunk!"

He carefully set down the brush and looked at her. "Hey, don't touch this—"

"The radio. I just heard it. Arthur Brendt is dead."

"What?"

"I'm serious. It was on the local news. He was murdered

early this afternoon. Bludgeoned to death."

They were still discussing it when the doorbell rang. It was not the same two officers who had arrested Bunk. They weren't interested in Bunk. Their business was with Letty, whom they asked to accompany them to the police station to assist in their inquiries into Arthur Brendt's murder.

For Letty it was one of the longest nights of her life. Being fingerprinted was just the start, after that began the endless, repetitive questions.

Lieutenant Michaelson was polite but relentlessly efficient.

"Mrs. Talcott, your prints match those on the murder weapon—a silver candlestick. Your station wagon was seen parked in the Brendt driveway this afternoon. A woman matching your description was seen driving away at about one o'clock. Mrs. Brendt swears that you called and made an appointment to see her husband at noon. She also told us you visited her earlier to ask her to drop certain criminal charges made against your husband. That she told you it would be up to her husband to make that decision when he returned from a business trip to Chicago. She insists that her husband was absolutely opposed to dropping the charges."

Letty glanced at Bunk and back to the detective. "That's not true. Not any of it. Except—well, I did go to see her. And she did agree to drop the charges—in return for a favor."

"Favor?"

Bunk intervened. "Lieutenant, I won't allow any more questions until our lawyer is with us."

"No!" Letty cried. "I don't need a lawyer. It's all a tissue of lies." Stumbling over her words she told the whole story, her agreement to impersonate Isobel Brendt in return for her promise to drop the burglary charges.

Michaelson, in reply, reminded her that only her prints were found on the Ford's steering wheel and door handle.

"Of course they were! She would have wiped hers off when she returned to the mall after killing her husband. Why can't you see it? She set me up to give herself an alibi for the afternoon. It's what happened!"

She looked imploringly at Bunk. "Tell him! You were there when I left the shop wearing that wig. You were there when I came home—"

"Honey, that's not the point. I know what happened. What the lieutenant is saying is that he needs proof. Right now it's your word against hers."

Michaelson nodded. "And the

evidence supports her story. We've already questioned a dozen witnesses who swear they saw Mrs. Brendt in town and at the mall this morning and early afternoon. And you can't deny your prints are on the murder weapon."

Wearily, Letty repeated her explanation. "It was part of her plot to incriminate me."

"Mrs. Talcott, without proof—"

"Wait a minute! I *can* prove it. I just remembered. The antique shop. In Montgomery Square."

Bunk reacted to this outburst with a puzzled frown. "Antique shop?"

"It was after I'd been to the museum. I passed this shop—you know the one—Cardell's. I saw this old print in the window—of a Swiss grenadier. I thought it would be just the birthday present for you, darling. I went in and made a deposit on it and promised to pick it up later."

"And what time was this?" Michaelson asked.

"One o'clock, give or take a few minutes. The proprietor knows me. He even made a remark about my looking 'different.' I was there for about fifteen minutes."

Bunk still looked bewildered. "Honey, you didn't tell me about that."

"I couldn't. It was your birthday present." She looked at Michaelson. "Check with that shop. Then you'll have to believe me. In fact, I must have been there at around the time you say Brendt was murdered."

Michaelson was busy with his notebook. "I'll have the sergeant bring in some coffee while I run this down. Shouldn't take too long."

He was absent for at least an hour, during which time neither Letty nor Bunk seemed inclined to exchange more than a few hopefully encouraging words; it was as if they both realized how crucial to their lives would be the result of Michaelson's inquiries.

He finally returned, apologized for the delay, thanked them for their help. He smiled at Letty. "You're free to go now."

As they stood up, Bunk put his arm around Letty's shoulders. Without a word they moved toward the door.

Michaelson said: "Your wife is free to leave, Mr. Talcott. We'll have to ask you to remain. And I suggest you call your lawyer."

They both turned to stare at him.

"James Cardell corroborates your story, Mrs. Talcott. We've taken Isobel Brendt into custody. She now admits the plot

to incriminate you. And more. I'm arresting you, Bernard Talcott, on a charge of conspiracy to commit murder. The lady insists it was all your idea."

Bunk had been convicted and sentenced before Letty returned to the shop in Montgomery Square. The proprietor, a slim, dark-haired young man with curly brown hair, greeted her with a compassionate smile.

"Did you think I'd never pick up that print?" she asked.

"You still want it?"

"Why not? It saved my life, didn't it? The print—and your testimony."

He removed the print from a shelf and placed it on the counter between them. "Must have been rough for you—the trial and all."

"A nightmare. But now it's over. I can begin to live again. Poor Bunk. He outsmarted himself that time. I often wonder what he would have done if I'd refused that day to take the washstand out of that old house on Rockstream Road."

Cardell smiled. "They would have had to invent some other plot, I suppose. One has to admit it was rather ingenious. Killing Brendt and framing you for his murder."

"I should have realized long before I did that Bunk had an-

other woman on the string. All those stories about trips to appraise various antiques, none of which ever resulted in a buy. But then I never gave it much thought—his absences were so very convenient. I was too busy with my own little affair to worry about what Bunk was up to.”

Cardell looked offended, but with a twinkle in his eye. “*Little affair?*”

“You know what I mean, Jimmy.”

“I know you might never have learned the truth about old Bunk if I hadn’t spotted them in that bar a couple of months ago.”

“She could have been a customer.”

“Way they were acting? That’s why I started following her. I had to prove it. I couldn’t have followed him. He would have recognized me.”

Letty smiled. “And naturally she thought you were someone her husband had hired, which gave Bunk the idea of how they could get rid of her husband and

set me up for his murder.”

“Pity about Brendt, of course.”

Letty’s smile faded. “Let’s not think about that. When Bunk came back from the police station and told me Isobel Brendt was the owner of that washstand, I should maybe have told him right then that I knew all about him and Isobel Brendt, but I had to find out what they were up to. God, they must have thought I was a brainless simpleton.”

“With her husband dead and you convicted of murder they would have had everything they wanted.”

“And now we’ve got what we wanted.”

He came around the counter, hung the *Closed* sign on the door and switched off the lights. “Let’s go upstairs.”

Later, cradled warmly in his arms, Letty sighed, beguiled by a vision of what it was she *really* wanted.

“Jimmy, darling, I’ve been thinking. That old house on Rockstream Road. I’ll bet anyone could pick it up for a song.”

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Open Door

by Mrs. Oliphant

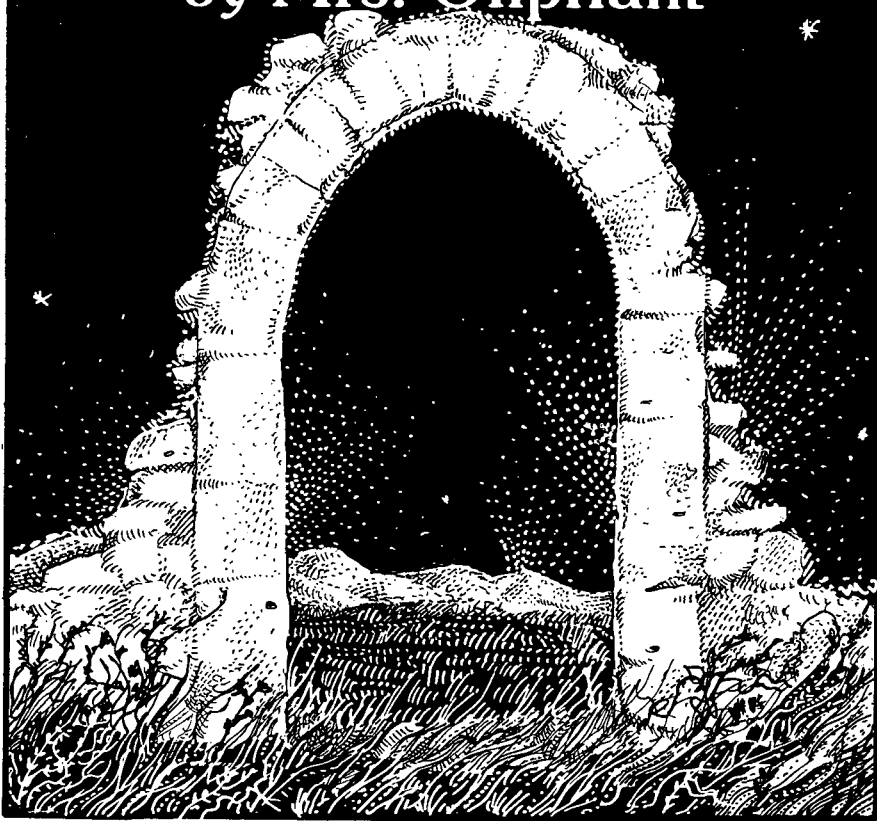


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

114

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I took the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 1800 for the temporary accommodation of my family until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland, whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than either leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother. The doctor, like a judicious man, took the mid way between. "Put him on his pony, and let him ride into the High School every morning; it will do him all the good in the world," Dr. Simson said; "and when it is bad weather there is the train." His mother accepted the solution of the difficulty more easily than I could have hoped; and our pale-faced boy, who had never known anything more invigorating than Simla, began to encounter the brisk breezes of the North in the subdued severity of the month of May. Before the time of the vacation in July we had the satisfaction of seeing him begin to acquire something of the brown and ruddy complexion of his schoolfellows. The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in those days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted either my wife or me. The lad was doubly precious to us, being the only one left us of many; and he was fragile in body we believed, and deeply sensitive in mind. To keep him at home, and yet to send him to school—to combine the advantages of the two systems—seemed to be everything that could be desired. The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother! I myself was then no more than twenty-five—an age at which I see the young fellows now groping about them, with no notion what they are going to do with their lives. However, I suppose every generation has a conceit of itself which elevates it, in its own opinion, above that which comes after it.

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland, which lies between the Pentland Hills and the Firth. In clear weather you could see the blue gleam—like a bent bow, embracing the wealthy fields and scattered houses—of

"The Open Door" was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January, 1882, and is presented here in a slightly abridged form.—ED.

the great estuary on one side of you; and on the other the blue heights, not gigantic like those we had been used to, but just high enough for all the glories of the atmosphere, the play of clouds, and sweet reflections, which give to a hilly country an interest and a charm which nothing else can emulate. Edinburgh, with its two lesser heights—the Castle and the Calton Hill—its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur's Seat lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him lay at our right hand. From the lawn and drawing room windows we could see all these varieties of landscape. The color was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its color and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream—which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river—flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid—perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse. Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees, through which various paths wound down to the riverside and to the village bridge which crossed the stream. The village lay in the hollow, and climbed, with very prosaic houses, the other side. Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland. The blue slates and the grey stone are sworn foes to the picturesque; and though I do not, for my own part, dislike the interior of an old fashioned pewed and galleried church, with its little family settlements on all sides, the square box outside, with its bit of a spire like a handle to lift it by, is not an improvement to the landscape. Still, a cluster of houses on differing elevations—with scraps of garden coming in between, a hedgerow with clothes laid out to dry, the opening of a street with its rural sociability, the women at their doors, the slow wagon lumbering along—gives a center to the landscape. It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways. Within ourselves we had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the autumn. In the park which surrounded

our house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood, a much smaller and less important house than the solid Georgian edifice which we inhabited. The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon ourselves. The old building had the remains of a tower; an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. I had never examined it closely, I am ashamed to say. There was a large room, or what had been a large room, with the lower part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. This was the oldest part of all. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of the building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered—pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing—closed once perhaps with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me, I remember, from the first; so perhaps it may be said that my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance which nothing justified.

The summer was a very happy period of repose for us all. The warmth of Indian suns was still in our veins. It seemed to us that we could never have enough of the greenness, the dewiness, the freshness of the northern landscape. Even its mists were pleasant to us, taking all the fever out of us, and pouring in vigor and refreshment. In autumn we followed the fashion of the time, and went away for a change which we did not in the least require. It was when the family had settled down for the winter, when the days were short and dark, and the rigorous reign of frost upon us, that the incidents occurred which alone could justify me in intruding upon the world my private affairs. These incidents were, however, of so curious a character that I hope my inevitable ref-

erences to my own family and pressing personal interests will meet with a general pardon.

I was absent in London when these events began. In London an old Indian plunges back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated, and meets old friends at every step. I had been circulating among some half-dozen of these—enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside—and had missed some of my home letters, what with going down from Friday to Monday to old Benbow's place in the country, and stopping on the way back to dine and sleep at Sellar's and to take a look into Cross's stables, which occupied another day. It is never safe to miss one's letters. In this transitory life, as the Prayer-book says, how can one ever be certain what is going to happen? All was well at home. I knew exactly (I thought) what they would have to say to me: "The weather has been so fine that Roland has not once gone by train and he enjoys the ride beyond anything." "Dear Papa, be sure that you don't forget anything, but bring us so-and-so and so-and-so"—a list as long as my arm. Dear girls and dearer mother! I would not for the world have forgotten their commissions or lost their little letters, for all the Benbows and Crosses in the world.

But I was confident in my home-comfort and peacefulness. When I got back to my club, however, three or four letters were lying for me, upon some of which I noticed the "immediate," "urgent," which old fashioned people and anxious people still believe will influence the post office and quicken the speed of the mails. I was about to open one of these, when the club porter brought me two telegrams, one of which, he said, had arrived the night before. I opened, as was to be expected, the last first, and this is what I read: "Why don't you come or answer? For God's sake come. He is much worse." This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had only one son, and he the light of his eyes! The other telegram, which I opened with hands trembling so much that I lost time by my haste, was to much the same purport: "No better; doctor afraid of brain fever. Calls for you day and night. Let nothing detain you." The first thing I did was to look up the timetables to see if there was any way of getting off sooner than by the night train, though I knew well enough there was not! and then I read the letters, which furnished, alas! too clearly, all the details. They told me that the boy had been pale for some time, with a scared look. His mother had noticed it before I left home, but would not say anything to alarm me. This look had increased day by day; and soon it was

observed that Roland came home at a wild gallop through the park, his pony panting and in foam, himself "as white as a sheet," but with the perspiration streaming from his forehead. For a long time he had resisted all questioning, but at length had developed such strange changes of mood, showing a reluctance to go to school, a desire to be fetched in the carriage at night—which was a ridiculous piece of luxury—an unwillingness to go out into the grounds, and nervous starts at every sound, that his mother had insisted upon an explanation. When the boy—our boy Roland, who had never known what fear was—began to talk to her of voices he had heard in the park, and shadows that had appeared to him among the ruins, my wife promptly put him to bed and sent for Dr. Simson—which, of course, was the only thing to do.

I hurried off that evening, as may be supposed, with an anxious heart. How I got through the hours before the starting of the train, I cannot tell. We must all be thankful for the quickness of the railway when in anxiety; but to have thrown myself into a post-chaise as soon as horses could be put to would have been a relief. I got to Edinburgh very early in the blackness of the winter morning, and scarcely dared look the man in the face at whom I gasped, "What news?" My wife had sent the brougham for me, which I concluded, before the man spoke, was a bad sign. His answer was that stereotyped answer which leaves the imagination so wildly free—"Just the same." Just the same! What might that mean? The horses seemed to me to creep along the dark country road. As we dashed through the park I thought I heard someone moaning among the trees, and clenched my fist at him (whoever he might be) with fury. Why had the fool of a woman at the gate allowed anyone to come in and disturb the quiet of the place? If I had not been in such hot haste to get home, I think I should have stopped the carriage and got out to see what tramp it was that had made an entrance and chosen my grounds, of all places in the world—when my boy was ill!—to grumble and groan in. But I had no reason to complain of our slow pace here. The horses flew like lightning along the intervening path, and drew up at the door all panting, as if they had run a race. My wife stood waiting to receive me with a pale face, and a candle in her hand, which made her look paler still as the wind blew the flame about. "He is sleeping," she said in a whisper, as if her voice might wake him. And I replied, when I could find my voice, also in a whisper, as though the jingling of the horses' furniture and the sound of their hoofs must not have been more dangerous. I stood on the steps with her a moment,

almost afraid to go in, now that I was here; and it seemed to me that I saw without observing, if I may say so, that the horses were unwilling to turn round, though their stables lay that way, or that the men were unwilling. These things occurred to me afterwards, though at the moment I was not capable of anything but to ask questions and to hear of the condition of the boy.

I looked at him from the door of his room, for we were afraid to go near, lest we should disturb that blessed sleep. It looked like actual sleep—not the lethargy into which my wife told me he would sometimes fall. She told me everything in the next room, which communicated with his, rising now and then and going to the door of communication; and in this there was much that was very startling and confusing to the mind. It appeared that ever since the winter began, since it was early dark, and night had fallen before his return from school, he had been hearing voices among the ruins—at first only a groaning, he said, at which his pony was as much alarmed as he was, but by degrees a voice. The tears ran down my wife's cheeks as she described to me how he would start up in the night and cry out, "Oh, Mother, let me in! oh, Mother, let me in!" with a pathos which rent her heart. And she sitting there all the time, only longing to do everything his heart could desire! But though she would try to soothe him, crying: "You are at home, my darling. I am here. Don't you know me? Your mother is here," he would only stare at her, and after a while spring up again with the same cry. At other times he would be quite reasonable, she said, asking eagerly when I was coming, but declaring that he must go with me as soon as I did so, "to let them in." "The doctor thinks his nervous system must have received a shock," my wife said. "Oh, Henry, can it be that we have pushed him on too much with his work—a delicate boy like Roland?—and what is his work in comparison with his health? Even you would think little of honors or prizes if it hurt the boy's health." Even I! as if I were an inhuman father sacrificing my child to his ambition. But I would not increase her trouble by taking any notice. After a while they persuaded me to lie down, to rest, and to eat—none of which things had been possible since I received their letters. The mere fact of being on the spot, of course, in itself was a great thing and when I knew that I would be called in a moment, as soon as he was awake and wanted me, I felt capable, even in the dark, chill morning twilight, to snatch an hour or two's sleep. As it happened, I was so worn out with the strain of anxiety, and he so quieted and

consoled by knowing I had come, that I was not disturbed till the afternoon, when the twilight had again settled down. There was just daylight enough to see his face when I went to him; and what a change in a fortnight! He was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in those dreadful days in the plains before we left India. His hair seemed to have grown long and lank; his eyes were like blazing lights projecting out of his white face. He got hold of my hand in a cold and tremulous clutch, and waved to everybody to go away. "Go away—even Mother," he said, "go away." This went to her heart, for she did not like that even I should have more of the boy's confidence than herself; but my wife has never been a woman to think of herself, and she left us alone. "Are they all gone?" he said, eagerly. "They would not let me speak. The doctor treated me as if I were a fool. You know I am not a fool, Papa."

"Yes, yes, my boy, I know; but you are ill, and quiet is so necessary. You are not only not a fool, Roland, but you are reasonable and understand. When you are ill you must deny yourself; you must not do everything that you might do being well."

He waved his thin hand with a sort of indignation.

"Then, Father, I am not ill," he cried. "Oh, I thought when you came you would not stop me—you would see the sense of it! What do you think is the matter with me, all of you? Simson is well enough, but he is only a doctor. What do you think is the matter with me? I am no more ill than you are. A doctor, a doctor, of course, he thinks you are ill the moment he looks at you—that's what he's there for—and claps you into bed."

"Which is the best place for you at present, my dear boy."

"I made up my mind," cried the little fellow, "that I would stand it till you came home. I said to myself, I won't frighten Mother and the girls. But now, Father," he cried, half jumping out of bed, "it's not illness—it's a secret."

His eyes shone so wildly, his face was so swept with strong feeling, that my heart sank within me. It could be nothing but fever that did it, and fever had been so fatal. I got him into my arms to put him back into bed. "Roland," I said, humoring the poor child, which I knew was the only way, "if you are going to tell me this secret to do any good, you know you must be quite quiet, and not excite yourself. If you excite yourself, I must not let you speak."

"Yes, Father," said the boy. He was quiet directly, like a man, as if he quite understood. When I had laid him back on his pillow, he looked up at me with that grateful, sweet look with which

children, when they are ill, break one's heart, the water coming into his eyes in his weakness. "I was sure as soon as you were here you would know what to do," he said.

"To be sure, my boy. Now keep quiet, and tell it all out like a man." To think I was telling lies to my own child! for I did it only to humor him, thinking, poor little fellow, his brain was wrong.

"Yes, Father. Father, there is someone in the park—someone that has been badly used."

"Hush, my dear; you remember, there is to be no excitement. Well, who is this somebody, and who has been ill-using him? We will soon put a stop to that."

"Ah," cried Roland, "but it is not so easy as you think. I don't know who it is. It is just a cry. Oh, if you could hear it! It gets into my head in my sleep. I hear it as clear as clear; and they think that I am dreaming—or raving perhaps," the boy said, with a sort of disdainful smile.

This look of his perplexed me; it was less like fever than I thought. "Are you quite sure you have not dreamt it, Roland?" I said.

"Dreamt?—that!" He was springing up again when he suddenly bethought himself, and lay down flat with the same sort of smile on his face. "The pony heard it, too," he said. "She jumped as if she had been shot. If I had not grasped at the reins—for I was frightened, Father—"

"No shame to you, my boy," said I, though I scarcely knew why.

"If I hadn't held to her like a leech, she'd have pitched me over her head, and she never drew breath till we were at the door. Did the pony dream it?" he said, with a soft disdain, yet indulgence for my foolishness. Then he added slowly: "It was only a cry the first time, and all the time before you went away. I wouldn't tell you, for it was so wretched to be frightened. I thought it might be a hare or a rabbit snared, and I went in the morning and looked, but there was nothing. It was after you went I heard it really first, and this is what he says." He raised himself on his elbow close to me, and looked me in the face. "'Oh, Mother, let me in! oh, Mother, let me in!'" As he said the words a mist came over his face, the mouth quivered, the soft features all melted and changed, and, when he had ended these pitiful words, dissolved in a shower of heavy tears.

Was it a hallucination? Was it the fever of the brain? Was it the disordered fancy caused by great bodily weakness? How could I tell? I thought it wisest to accept it as if it were all true.

"This is very touching, Roland," I said.

"Oh, if you had just heard it, Father! I said to myself, If Father heard it he would do something; but Mamma, you know, she's given over to Simson, and that fellow's a doctor, and never thinks of anything but clapping you into bed."

"We must not blame Simson for being a doctor, Roland."

"No, no," said my boy, with delightful toleration and indulgence, "oh, no; that's the good of him—that's what he's for; I know that. But you—you are different; you are just Father: and you'll do something—directly, Papa, directly—this very night."

"Surely," I said. "No doubt, it is some little lost child."

He gave me a sudden, swift look, investigating my face as though to see whether; after all, this was everything my eminence as "Father" came to—no more than that? Then he got hold of my shoulder, clutching it with his thin hands: "Look here," he said, with a quiver in his voice; "suppose it wasn't—living at all!"

"My dear boy, how then could you have heard it?" I said.

He turned away from me, with a pettish exclamation—"As if you didn't know better than that!"

"Do you want to tell me it is a ghost?" I said.

Roland withdrew his hand; his countenance assumed an aspect of great dignity and gravity; a slight quiver remained about his lips. "Whatever it was—you always said we were not to call names. It was something—in trouble. Oh, Father, in terrible trouble!"

"But, my boy," I said—I was at my wits' end—"if it was a child that was lost, or any poor human creature—But, Roland, what do you want me to do?"

"I should know if I was you," said the child eagerly. "That is what I always said to myself—Father will know. Oh, Papa, Papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble! and never be able to do it any good. I don't want to cry; it's like a baby, I know; but what can I do else?—out there all by itself in the ruin, and nobody to help it. I can't bear it, I can't bear it!" cried my generous boy. And in his weakness he burst out, after many attempts to restrain it, into a great childish fit of sobbing and tears.

I do not know that I ever was in a greater perplexity in my life; and afterwards, when I thought of it, there was something comic in it, too. It is bad enough to find your child's mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen—or heard—a ghost. But that he should require you to go instantly and help that ghost, was the most bewildering experience that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious—at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but

I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. I did my best to console my boy without giving any promise of this astonishing kind; but he was too sharp for me. He would have none of my caresses. With sobs breaking in at intervals upon his voice, and the raindrops hanging on his eyelids, he yet returned to the charge.

"It will be there now—it will be there all the night. Oh think, Papa, think, if it was me! I can't rest for thinking of it. Don't!" he cried, putting away my hand—"Don't! You go and help it, and Mother can take care of me."

"But, Roland, what can I do?"

My boy opened his eyes, which were large with weakness and fever and gave me a smile such, I think, as sick children only know the secret of. "I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said—Father will know: and Mother," he cried, with a softening of repose upon his face, his limbs relaxing, his form sinking with a luxurious ease in his bed—"Mother can come and take care of me."

I called her, and saw him turn to her with the complete dependence of a child, and then I went away and left them, as perplexed a man as any in Scotland. I must say, however, I had this consolation, that my mind was greatly eased about Roland. He might be under a hallucination, but his head was clear enough, and I did not think him so ill as everybody else did. The girls were astonished even at the ease with which I took it. "How do you think he is?" they said in a breath, coming round me, laying hold of me. "Not half so ill as I expected," I said; "not very bad at all." "Oh, Papa, you are a darling," cried Agatha, kissing me, and crying upon my shoulder; while little Jeanie, who was as pale as Roland, clasped both her arms round mine, and could not speak at all. I knew nothing about it, not half so much as Simson; but they believed in me; they had a feeling that all would go right now. God is very good to you when your children look to you like that. It makes one humble, not proud. I was not worthy of it; and then I recollected that I had to act the part of a father to Roland's ghost, which made me almost laugh, though I might just as well have cried. It was the strangest mission that ever was entrusted to mortal man.

It was then I remembered suddenly the looks of the men when they turned to take the brougham to the stables in the dark that morning: they had not liked it, and the horses had not liked it. I remembered that even in my anxiety about Roland I had heard them tearing along the avenue back to the stables, and had made a memorandum mentally that I must speak of it. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go to the stables now and make a few inquiries. It is impossible to fathom the minds of rustics; there might be some devilry of practical joking, for anything I knew; or they might have some interest in getting up a bad reputation for the Brentwood avenue. It was getting dark by the time I went out, and nobody who knows the country will need to be told how black is the darkness of a November night under high laurel bushes and yew trees. I walked into the heart of the shrubberies two or three times, not seeing a step before me, till I came out upon the broader carriage road, where the trees opened a little, and there was a faint grey glimmer of sky visible, under which the great limes and elms stood darkling like ghosts; but it grew black again as I approached the corner where the ruins lay. Both eyes and ears were on the alert, as may be supposed; but I could see nothing in the absolute gloom, and, so far as I can recollect, I heard nothing. Nevertheless, there came a strong impression upon me that somebody was there. It is a sensation which most people have felt. I have seen when it has been strong enough to awake me out of sleep, the sense of someone looking at me. I suppose my imagination had been affected by Roland's story; and the mystery of the darkness is always full of suggestions. I stamped my feet violently on the gravel to rouse myself, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" Nobody answered, nor did I expect anyone to answer, but the impression had been made. I was so foolish that I did not like to look back, but went sideways, keeping an eye on the gloom behind. It was with great relief that I spied the light in the stables, making a sort of oasis in the darkness. I walked very quickly into the midst of that lighted and cheerful place, and thought the clank of the groom's pail one of the pleasantest sounds I had ever heard. The coachman was the head of this little colony, and it was to his house I went to pursue my investigations. He was a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years; it was impossible but that he must know everything that was going on, and all the traditions of the place. The men, I could see, eyed me anxiously when I thus appeared at such an hour among them, and followed me with their eyes to Jarvis's house,

where he lived alone with his old wife, their children being all married and out in the world. Mrs. Jarvis met me with anxious questions. How was the poor young gentleman? but the others knew, I could see by their faces, that not even this was the foremost thing in my mind.

"Noises?—ou ay, there'll be noises—the wind in the trees, and the water soughing down the glen. As for tramps, cornel, no, there's little o' that kind of cattle about here; and Merran at the gate's a careful body." Jarvis moved about with some embarrassment from one leg to another as he spoke. He kept in the shade, and did not look at me more than he could help. Evidently his mind was perturbed, and he had reasons for keeping his own counsel. His wife sat by, giving him a quick look now and then, but saying nothing. The kitchen was very snug, and warm, and bright—as different as could be from the chill and mystery of the night outside.

"I think you are trifling with me, Jarvis," I said.

"Triflin', cornel? No me. What would I trifle for? If the deevil himsel' was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in't one way or another—"

"Sandy, hold your peace!" cried his wife imperatively.

"And what am I to hold my peace for, wi' the cornel standing there asking a' thae questions? I'm saying, if the deevil himsel'—"

"And I'm telling ye hold your peace!" cried the woman, in great excitement. "Dark November weather and lang nights, and us that ken a' we ken. How daur ye name—a name that shouldna be spoken?" She threw down her stocking and got up, also in great agitation. "I tell't ye you never could keep it. It's no a thing that will hide; and the haill toun kens as well as you or me. Tell the cornel straight out—or see, I'll do it. I dinna hold wi' your secrets; and a secret that the haill toun kens!" She snapped her fingers with an air of large disdain. As for Jarvis, ruddy and big as he was, he shrank to nothing before this decided woman. He repeated to her two or three times her own adjuration, "Hold your peace!" then, suddenly changing his tone, cried out, "Tell him then, confound ye! I'll wash my hands o't. If a' the ghosts in Scotland were in the auld hoose, is that one concern o' mine?"

After this I elicited without much difficulty the whole story. In the opinion of the Jarvises, and of everybody about, the certainty that the place was haunted was beyond all doubt. As Sandy and his wife warmed to the tale, one tripping up another in their eagerness to tell everything, it gradually developed as distinct a

superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos. How long it was since the voice had been heard first, nobody could tell with certainty. Jarvis's opinion was that his father, who had been coachman at Brentwood before him, had never heard anything about it, and that the whole thing had arisen within the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house: which was a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated. According to these witnesses, and to several whom I questioned afterwards, and who were all in perfect agreement, it was only in the months of November and December that "the visitation" occurred. During these months, the darkest of the year, scarcely a night passed without the recurrence of these inexplicable cries. Nothing, it was said, had ever been seen—at least nothing that could be identified. Some people, bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving, Mrs. Jarvis said, with unconscious poetry. It began when night fell and continued, at intervals, till day broke. Very often it was only an inarticulate cry and moaning, but sometimes the words which had taken possession of my poor boy's fancy had been distinctly audible—"Oh, Mother, let me in!" The Jarvises were not aware that there had ever been any investigation into it. The estate of Brentwood had lapsed into the hands of a distant branch of the family, who had lived but little there; and of the many people who had taken it, as I had done, few had remained through two Decembers. And nobody had taken the trouble to make a very close examination into the facts. "No, no," Jarvis said, shaking his head. "No, no, cornel. Wha wad set themselves up for a laughin' stock to a' the countryside, making a wark about a ghost? Naebody believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentleman said, or some effec' o' the water wrastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained: but he gave up the hoose. And when you came, cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for nothing?"

"Do you call my child's life nothing?" I said in the trouble of the moment, unable to restrain myself. "And instead of telling this all to me, you have told it to him—to a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature—"

I was walking about the room with an anger all the hotter that I felt it to be most likely quite unjust. My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people's children and comfort rather than let the house lie

empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost story! I paced about in high wrath, and seeing what I was to do; for, to take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind; and I feared even that a scientific explanation of refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced, would have very little effect upon the boy.

"Cornel," said Jarvis, solemnly, "ond *she'll* bear me witness—the young gentleman never heard a word from me—no, nor from either groom or gardener; I'll gie ye my word for that. In the first place, he's no a lad that invites ye to talk. There are some that are, and some that are na. Some will draw ye on, till ye've tellt them a' the clatter of the toun, and a' ye ken, and whiles mair. But Maister Roland, his mind's fu' of his books. He's aye civil and kind, and a fine lad; but no that sort. And ye see it's for a' our interest, cornel, that you should stay at Brentwood. I took it upon me mysel' to pass the word—'No a syllable to Maister Roland, nor to the young led-dies—no a syllable.' The women-servants, that have little reason to be out at night, ken little or nothing about it. And some think it grand to have a ghost so long as they're no in the way of coming across it. If you had been tellt the story to begin with, maybe ye would have thought so yourself."

This was true enough, though it did not throw any light upon my perplexity. If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times. We never think what a risk it is to play with young imaginations, but cry out, in the fashionable jargon, "A ghost!—nothing else was wanted to make it perfect." I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity. Oh yes, I claim no exemption. The girls would have been delighted. I could fancy their eagerness, their interest, and excitement. No; if we had been told, it would have done no good—we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are. "And there has been no attempt to investigate it," I said, "to see what it really is?"

"Eh, cornel," said the coachman's wife, "wha would investigate, as ye call it, a thing that nobody believes in? Ye would be the

laughingstock of a' the countryside, as my man says."

"But you believe in it," I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

"Lord, cornel, how ye frichten a body! Me!—there's awful strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Inquire into the thing that is not! Na, na, we just let it be."

"Come with me, Jarvis," I said, hastily, "and we'll make an attempt at least. Say nothing to the men or to anybody. I'll come back after dinner, and we'll make a serious attempt to see what it is, if it is anything. If I hear it—which I doubt—you may be sure I shall never rest till I make it out. Be ready for me about ten o'clock."

"Me, cornel!" Jarvis said, in a faint voice. I had not been looking at him in my own preoccupation, but when I did so, I found that the greatest change had come over the fat and ruddy coachman. "Me, cornel!" he repeated, wiping the perspiration from his brow. His ruddy face hung in flabby folds, his knees knocked together, his voice seemed half extinguished in his throat. Then he began to rub his hands and smile upon me in a deprecating, imbecile way. "There's nothing I wouldna do to pleasure ye, cornel," taking a step farther back. "I'm sure *she* kens I've aye said I never had to do with a mair fair, weelspoken gentleman." Here Jarvis came to a pause, again looking at me, rubbing his hands.

"Well?" I said.

"But eh, sir!" he went on, with the same imbecile yet insinuating smile, "if ye'll reflect that I am no used to my feet. With a horse atween my legs, or the reins in my hand, I'm maybe nae worse than other men; but on fit, cornel—It's no the—boggles;—but I've been cavalry, ye see," with a little hoarse laugh, "a' my life. To face a thing ye didna understan'—on you feet, cornel—"

"Well, sir, if I do it," said I tartly, "why shouldn't you?"

"Eh, cornel, there's an awfu' difference. In the first place, ye tramp about the haill countryside, and think naething of it; but a walk tires me mair than a hunard miles' drive; and then ye's a gentleman, and do your ain pleasure; and you're no so auld as me; and it's for your ain bairn, ye see, cornel; and then—"

"He believes in it, cornel, and you dinna believe in it," the woman said.

"Will you come with me?" I said, turning to her.

She jumped back, upsetting her chair in her bewilderment. "Me!"

with a scream, and then fell into a sort of hysterical laugh. "I wouldna say but what I would go; but what would the folk say to hear of Cornel Mortimer with an auld silly woman at his heels?"

The suggestion made me laugh too, though I had little inclination for it. "I'm sorry you have so little spirit, Jarvis," I said. "I must find someone else, I suppose."

Jarvis, touched by this, began to remonstrate, but I cut him short. My butler was a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything—man or devil—certainly not the former; and I felt that I was losing time. The Jarvises were too thankful to get rid of me. They attended me to the door with the most anxious courtesies. Outside, the two grooms stood close by, a little confused by my sudden exit. I don't know if perhaps they had been listening—at least standing as near as possible, to catch any scrap of the conversation. I waved my hand to them as I went past, in answer to their salutations, and it was very apparent to me that they were also glad to see me go.

And it will be thought very strange, but it would be weak not to add, that I myself, though bent on the investigation I have spoken of, pledged to Roland to carry it out, and feeling that my boy's health, perhaps his life, depended on the result of my inquiry—I felt the most unaccountable reluctance to pass these ruins on my way home. My curiosity was intense; and yet it was all my mind could do to pull my body along. I daresay the scientific people would describe it the other way, and attribute my cowardice to the state of my stomach. I went on; but if I had followed my impulse, I should have turned and bolted. Everything in me seemed to cry out against it; my heart thumped, my pulses all began, like sledge-hammers, beating against my ears and every sensitive part. It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only not entirely so solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed out of the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid. What was it? The contact with hard stone and lime, and prickly bramblebushes, restored me a little to myself. "Oh, it's only the old gable," I said aloud with a little laugh to reassure myself. The rough feeling of the stones reconciled me. As I groped about thus, I shook off my visionary folly. What so easily explained as that I should have strayed from the path in the darkness? This brought me back to common existence, as if I had been

shaken by a wise hand out of all the silliness of superstition. How silly it was, after all! What did it matter which path I took? I laughed again, this time with better heart—when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me. Close by me at my side, at my feet, there was a sigh. No, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible—a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh. I sprang back, and my heart stopped beating. Mistaken! no, mistake was impossible. I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak; a long, soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast. To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night (though it was still early), had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now—something cold creeping over me, up into my hair, and down to my feet, which refused to move. I cried out with a trembling voice, "Who is there?" as I had done before—but there was no reply.

I got home—I don't quite know how; but in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My skepticism disappeared like a mist. I was as firmly determined that there was something as Roland was. I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understand all about, crackling of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplex you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don't affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. I had not the same sense of unwillingness to turn my back upon the scene of the mystery which I had experienced in going to the stables; but I almost ran home, impelled by eagerness to get everything done that had to be done in order to apply myself to finding it out. Bagley was in the hall as usual when I went in. He was always there in the afternoon, always with the appearance of perfect occupation, yet, so far as I know, never doing anything. The door was open, so that I hurried in without any pause, breathless; but the sight of his calm regard, as he came to help me off with my overcoat, subdued me in a moment. Anything out of the way, anything incomprehensible faded to nothing in the presence

of Bagley. You saw and wondered how *he* was made: the parting of his hair, the tie of his white neckcloth, the fit of his trousers, all perfect as works of art; but you could see how they were done, which makes all the difference. I flung myself upon him, so to speak, without waiting to note the extreme unlikeness of the man to anything of the kind I meant. "Bagley," I said, "I want you to come out with me tonight to watch for—"

"Poachers, colonel," he said, a gleam of pleasure running all over him.

"No, Bagley; a great deal worse," I cried.

"Yes, colonel; at what hour, sir?" the man said; but then I had not told him what it was.

It was ten o'clock when we set out. All was perfectly quiet indoors. My wife was with Roland, who had been quite calm, she said, and who (though, no doubt, the fever must run its course) had been better since I came. I told Bagley to put on a thick greatcoat over his evening coat, and did the same myself—with strong boots; for the soil was like a sponge, or worse. Talking to him, I almost forgot what we were going to do. It was darker even than it had been before, and Bagley kept very close to me as we went along. I had a small lantern in my hand, which gave us a partial guidance. We had come to the corner where the path turns. On one side was the bowling green, which the girls had taken possession of for their croquet ground—a wonderful enclosure surrounded by high hedges of holly, three hundred years old and more; on the other, the ruins. Both were black as night; but before we got so far, there was a little opening in which we could just discern the trees and the lighter line of the road. I thought it best to pause there and take breath. "Bagley," I said, "there is something about these ruins I don't understand. It is there I am going. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see—anything, man or woman. Don't hurt, but seize—anything you see." "Colonel," said Bagley, with a little tremor in his breath, "they do say there's things there—as is neither man nor woman." There was no time for words. "Are you game to follow me, my man? that's the question," I said. Bagley fell in without a word, and saluted. I knew then I had nothing to fear.

We went, so far as I could guess, exactly as I had come when I heard that sigh. The darkness, however, was so complete that all marks, as of trees or paths, disappeared. One moment we felt our feet on the gravel, another sinking noiselessly into the slippery grass, that was all. I had shut up my lantern, not wishing to scare

anyone, whoever it might be. Bagley followed, it seemed to me, exactly in my footsteps as I made my way, as I supposed, towards the mass of the ruined house. We seemed to take a long time groping along seeking this; the squash of the wet soil under our feet was the only thing that marked our progress. After a while I stood still to see, or rather feel, where we were. The darkness was very still, but no stiller than is usual in a winter's night. The sounds I have mentioned—the crackling of twigs, the roll of a pebble, the sound of some rustle in the dead leaves, or creeping creature on the grass—were audible when you listened, all mysterious enough when your mind is disengaged, but to me cheering now as signs of the livingness of nature, even in the death of the frost. As we stood still, there came up from the trees in the glen the prolonged hoot of an owl. Bagley started with alarm, being in a state of general nervousness, and not knowing what he was afraid of. But to me the sound was encouraging and pleasant, being so comprehensible. "An owl," I said, under my breath. "Y—es, colonel," said Bagley, his teeth chattering. We stood still about five minutes, while it broke into the still brooding of the air, the sound widening out in circles, dying upon the darkness. This sound, which is not a cheerful one, made me almost gay. It was natural, and relieved the tension of the mind. I moved on with new courage, my nervous excitement calming down.

When all at once, quite suddenly, close to us, at our feet, there broke out a cry. I made a spring backwards in the first moment of surprise and horror, and in doing so came sharply against the same rough masonry and brambles that had struck me before. This new sound came upwards from the ground—a low, moaning, wailing voice, full of suffering and pain. The contrast between it and the hoot of the owl was indescribable; the one with a wholesome wildness and naturalness that hurt nobody—the other a sound that made one's blood curdle, full of human misery. With a great deal of fumbling—for in spite of everything I could do to keep up my courage my hands shook—I managed to remove the slide of my lantern. The light leaped out like something living, and made the place visible in a moment. We were what would have been inside the ruined building had anything remained but the gable wall which I have described. It was close to us, the vacant doorway in it going out straight into the blackness outside. The light showed the bit of wall, the ivy glistening upon it in clouds of dark green, the bramble branches waving, and below, the open door—a door that led to nothing. It was from this the voice came which died out

just as the light flashed upon this strange scene. There was a moment's silence, and then it broke forth again. The sound was so near, so penetrating, so pitiful, that, on the nervous start I gave, the light fell out of my hand. As I groped for it in the dark my hand was clutched by Bagley, who I think must have dropped upon his knees; but I was too much perturbed myself to think much of this. He clutched at me in the confusion of his terror, forgetting all his usual decorum. "For God's sake, what is it, sir?" he gasped. If I yielded, there was evidently an end of both of us. "I can't tell," I said, "any more than you; that's what we've got to find out: up, man, up!" I pulled him to his feet. "Will you go round and examine the other side, or will you stay here with the lantern?" Bagley gasped at me with a face of horror. "Can't we stay together, colonel?" he said—his knees were trembling under him. I pushed him against the corner of the wall, and put the light into his hands. "Stand fast till I come back; shake yourself together, man; let nothing pass you," I said. The voice was within two or three feet of us, of that there could be no doubt.

I went myself to the other side of the wall, keeping close to it. The light shook in Bagley's hand but, tremulous though it was, shone out through the vacant door, one oblong block of light marking all the crumbling corners and hanging masses of foliage. Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands; but it was only a juniper bush growing close against the wall. Meanwhile, the sight of my figure crossing the doorway had brought Bagley's nervous excitement to a height: he flew at me, gripping my shoulder. "I've got him, colonel! I've got him!" he cried, with a voice of sudden exultation. He thought it was a man, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us, at our feet—more close to us than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. I suppose, at the same moment, he saw that it was me whom he had clutched. I, for my part, had scarcely more command of myself. I snatched the light out of his hand, and flashed it all about me wildly. Nothing—the juniper bush which I thought I had never seen before, the heavy growth of the glistening ivy, the brambles waving. It was close to my ears now, crying, pleading as if for life. Either I heard the same words Roland had heard, or else, in my excitement, his imagination got possession of mine. The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from

another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward—"Mother! Mother!" and then an outburst of wailing. As my mind steadied, getting accustomed (as one's mind gets accustomed to anything), it seemed to me as if some uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door. Sometimes—but that must have been excitement—I thought I heard a sound like knocking, and then another burst, "Oh, Mother! Mother!" All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern—now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.

"Do you hear it, Bagley? do you hear what it is saying?" I cried, stepping in through the doorway. He was lying against the wall—his eyes glazed, half dead with terror. He made a motion of his lips as if to answer me, but no sounds came; then lifted his hand with a curious imperative movement as if ordering me to be silent and listen. And how long I did so I cannot tell. It began to have an interest, an exciting hold on me, which I could not describe. It seemed to call up visibly a scene any one could understand—a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro; sometimes the voice dropped, as if throwing itself down—sometimes wandered off a few paces, growing sharp and clear. "Oh, Mother, let me in! oh, Mother, Mother, let me in! oh, let me in!" every word was clear to me. No wonder the boy had gone wild with pity. I tried to steady my mind upon Roland, upon his conviction that I could do something, but my head swam with the excitement, even when I partially overcame the terror. At last the words died away, and there was a sound of sobs and moaning. I cried out, "In the name of God who are you?" with a kind of feeling in my mind that to use the name of God was profane, seeing that I did not believe in ghosts or anything supernatural; but I did it all the same, and waited, my heart giving a leap of terror lest there should be a reply. Why this should have been I cannot tell, but I had a feeling that if there was an answer, it would be more than I could bear. But there was no answer; the moaning went on, and then, as if it had been real, the voice rose, a little higher again, the words recommenced, "Oh, Mother, let me in! oh, Mother, let me in!" with an expression that was heartbreaking to hear.

As if it had been real! What do I mean by that? I suppose I got less alarmed as the thing went on. I began to recover the use of my senses—I seemed to explain it all to myself by saying that this had once happened, that it was a recollection of a real scene. Why

there should have seemed something quite satisfactory and composing in this explanation I cannot tell, but so it was. I began to listen almost as if it had been a play, forgetting Bagley, who, I almost think, had fainted, leaning against the wall. I was startled out of this strange spectatorship that had fallen upon me by the sudden rush of something which made my heart jump once more, a large black figure in the doorway waving its arms. "Come in! come in! come in!" it shouted out hoarsely at the top of a deep bass voice, and then poor Bagley fell down senseless across the threshold. He was less sophisticated than I—he had not been able to bear it any longer. I took him for something supernatural, as he took me, and it was some time before I awoke to the necessities of the moment. I remembered only after, that from the time I began to give my attention to the man, I heard the other voice no more. It was some time before I brought him to. It must have been a strange scene; the lantern making a luminous spot in the darkness, the man's white face lying on the black earth, I over him, doing what I could for him. Probably I should have been thought to be murdering him had anyone seen us. When at last I succeeded in pouring a little brandy down his throat he sat up and looked about him wildly. "What's up?" he said; then recognizing me, tried to struggle to his feet with a faint "Beg your pardon, colonel." I got him home as best I could, making him lean upon my arm. The great fellow was as weak as a child. Fortunately he did not for some time remember what had happened. From the time Bagley fell, the voice had stopped, and all was still.

"You've got an epidemic in your house, colonel," Simson said to me next morning. "What's the meaning of it all? Here's your butler raving about a voice. This will never do, you know; and so far as I can make out, you are in it, too."

"Yes, I am in it, doctor. I thought I had better speak to you. Of course you are treating Roland all right—but the boy is not raving, he is as sane as you or me. It's all true."

"As sane as—I—or you. I never thought the boy insane. He's got cerebral excitement, fever. I don't know what you've got. There's something very queer about the look of your eyes."

"Come," said I, "you can't put us all to bed, you know. You had better listen and hear the symptoms in full."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, but he listened to me patiently. He did not believe a word of the story, that was clear; but he heard it all from beginning to end. "My dear fellow," he said,

"the boy told me just the same. It's an epidemic. When one person falls a victim to this sort of thing, it's some trick of the echoes or the winds—some phonetic disturbance or other—

"Come with me tonight, and judge for yourself," I said.

Upon this he laughed aloud, then said, "That's not such a bad idea; but it would ruin me forever if it were known that John Simson was ghost-hunting."

"There it is," said I; "you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!"

"It's not science—it's common sense," said the doctor. "The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe."

"I should have said so yesterday; and I don't want you to be convinced or to believe," said I. "If you prove it to be a delusion, I shall be very much obliged to you for one. Come; somebody must go with me."

"You are cool," said the doctor. "You've disabled this poor fellow of yours, and made him—on that point—a lunatic for life; and now you want to disable me. But for once, I'll do it. To save appearance, if you'll give me a bed I'll come over after my last rounds."

It was agreed that I should meet him at the gate, and that we should visit the scene of last night's occurrences before we came to the house, so that nobody might be the wiser.

That night at eleven I met Simson. He had come by train, and I let him in gently myself. I had been so much absorbed in the coming experiment that I passed the ruins in going to meet him, almost without thought, if you can understand that. I had my lantern; and he showed me a coil of taper which he had ready for use. "There is nothing like light," he said, in his scoffing tone. It was a very still night, scarcely a sound, but not so dark. We could keep the path without difficulty as we went along. As we approached the spot we could hear a low moaning, broken occasionally by a bitter cry. "Perhaps that is your voice," said the doctor; "I thought it must be something of the kind. That's a poor brute caught in some of these infernal traps of yours; you'll find it among the bushes somewhere." I said nothing. I felt no particular fear, but a triumphant satisfaction in what was to follow. I led him to the spot where Bagley and I had stood on the previous night. All was silent as a winter night could be—so silent that we heard far off the sound of the horses in the stables, the shutting of a window

at the house. Simson lighted his taper and went peering about, poking into all the corners. We looked like two conspirators lying in wait for some unfortunate traveler; but not a sound broke the quiet. The moaning had stopped before we came up; a star or two shone over us in the sky, looking down as if surprised at our proceedings. Dr. Simson did nothing but utter subdued laughs under his breath. "I thought as much," he said. "It is just the same with tables and all other kinds of ghostly apparatus; a skeptic's presence stops everything. When I am present nothing ever comes off. How long do you think it will be necessary to stay here? Oh, I don't complain; only, when *you* are satisfied, I am—quite."

I will not deny that I was disappointed beyond measure by this result. It made me look like a credulous fool. It gave the doctor such a pull over me as nothing else could. I should point all his morals for years to come, and his materialism, his skepticism, would be increased beyond endurance. "It seems, indeed," I said, "that there is to be no—" "Manifestation," he said, laughing; "that is what all the mediums say. No manifestations, in consequence of the presence of an unbeliever." His laugh sounded very uncomfortable to me in the silence; and it was now near midnight. But that laugh seemed the signal; before it died away the moaning we had heard before was resumed. It started from some distance off, and came towards us, nearer and nearer, like someone walking along and moaning to himself. There could be no idea now that it was a hare caught in a trap. The approach was slow, like that of a weak person, with little halts and pauses. We heard it coming along the grass straight towards the vacant doorway. Simson had been a little startled by the first sound. He said hastily, "That child has no business to be out so late." But he felt as well as I, that this was no child's voice. As it came nearer, he grew silent, and going to the doorway with his taper, stood looking out towards the sound. The taper being unprotected blew about in the night air, though there was scarcely any wind. I threw the light of my lantern steady and white across the same space. It was a blaze of light in the midst of the blackness. A little icy thrill had gone over me at the first sound, but as it came close, I confess that my only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more. The light touched his own face, and showed a very perplexed countenance. If he was afraid, he concealed it with great success, but he was perplexed. And then all that had happened on the previous night was enacted once more. It fell strangely upon me with a sense of repetition. Every cry, every sob seemed the same as before. I listened almost

without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson. He maintained a very bold front on the whole. All that coming and going of the voice was, if our ears could be trusted, exactly in front of the vacant blank doorway, blazing full of light, which caught and shone in the glistening leaves of the great hollies at a little distance. Not a rabbit could have crossed the turf without being seen; but there was nothing. After a time, Simson, with a certain caution and bodily reluctance, as it seemed to me, went out with his roll of taper into this space. His figure showed against the holly in full outline. Just at this moment the voice sank, as was its custom, and seemed to fling itself down at the door. Simson recoiled violently, as if some one had come up against him, then turned, and held his taper low as if examining something. "Do you see anybody?" I cried in a whisper, feeling the chill of nervous panic steal over me at this action. "It's nothing but a—confounded juniper bush," he said. This I knew very well to be nonsense, for the juniper bush was on the other side. He went about after this round and round, poking his taper everywhere, then returned to me on the inner side of the wall. He scoffed no longer; his face was contracted and pale. "How long does this go on?" he whispered to me, like a man who does not wish to interrupt someone who is speaking. I had become too much perturbed myself to remark whether the successions and changes of the voice were the same as last night. It suddenly went out in the air almost as he was speaking, with a soft, reiterated sob dying away. If there had been anything to be seen, I should have said that the person was at that moment crouching on the ground close to the door.

We walked home very silent afterwards. It was only when we were in sight of the house that I said, "What do you think of it?" "I can't tell what to think of it," he said, quickly. He took—though he was a very temperate man—not the claret I was going to offer him, but some brandy from the tray, and swallowed it almost undiluted. "Mind you, I don't believe a word of it," he said, when he had lighted his candle; "but I can't tell what to think," he turned round to add, when he was halfway upstairs.

Next morning Simson was out before breakfast, and came in with evident signs of the damp grass on his boots, and a look of worry and weariness, which did not say much for the night he had passed. He improved a little after breakfast, and visited his two patients, for Bagley was still an invalid. I went out with him on his way to the train. "By the way," he said shortly, "didn't you notice that juniper bush on the left-hand side?" "There was one on

the right hand of the door. I noticed you made that mistake last night." "Mistake!" he cried with a curious low laugh, pulling up the collar of his coat as though he felt the cold—"there's no juniper there this morning, left or right. Just go and see." As he stepped into the train a few minutes after, he looked back upon me and beckoned me for a parting word. "I'm coming back tonight," he said.

I went straight from the railway to the manse, which stood on a little plateau on the side of the river opposite to the woods of Brentwood. The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience—a man who had "come across," in the course of his life, most people of note that had ever been in Scotland—and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith—but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. He received me with a cordial welcome. "Come away, Colonel Mortimer," he said; "I'm all the more glad to see you, that I feel it's a good sign for the boy. He's doing well?—God be praised—and the Lord bless him and keep him. He has many a poor body's prayers—and that can do nobody harm."

"He will need them all, Dr. Moncrieff," I said, "and your counsel too." And I told him the story—more than I had told Simson. The old clergyman listened to me with many suppressed exclamations, and at the end the water stood in his eyes.

"That's just beautiful," he said. "I do not mind to have heard anything like it; it's as fine as Burns when he wished deliverance to one—that is prayed for in no kirk. Ay, ay! so he would have you console the poor lost spirit? God bless the boy! There's something more than common in that, Colonel Mortimer. And also the faith of him in his father!—I would like to put that into a sermon." Then the old gentleman gave me an alarmed look, and said, "No, no; I was not meaning a sermon; but I must write it down for the *Children's Record*." I saw the thought that passed through his mind. Either he thought, or he feared I would think, of a funeral sermon. You may believe this did not make me more cheerful.

I can scarcely say that Dr. Moncrieff gave me any advice. How could any one advise on such a subject? But he said, "I think I'll

come, too. I'm an old man; I'm less liable to be frightened than those that are farther off the world unseen. It behooves me to think of my own journey there. I've no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come, too; and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do."

This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me. To be clear about the cause of it was not my grand desire. It was another thing that was in my mind—my boy. As for the poor soul at the open door, I had no more doubt, as I have said, of its existence than I had of my own. It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. That was my feeling about it, as it was Roland's. To hear it first was a great shock to my nerves, but not now; a man will get accustomed to anything. But to do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer? "Maybe at the moment the Lord will put it into our heads." This is very old fashioned phraseology, and a week before, most likely, I should have smiled (though always with kindness) at Dr. Moncrieff's credulity; but there was a great comfort, whether rational or otherwise I cannot say, in the mere sound of the words.

The road to the station and the village lay through the glen—not by the ruins; but though the sunshine and the fresh air, and the beauty of the trees, and the sound of the water were all very soothing to the spirits, my mind was so full of my own subject that I could not refrain from turning to the right hand as I got to the top of the glen, and going straight to the place which I may call the scene of all my thoughts. It was lying full in the sunshine, like all the rest of the world. The ruined gable looked due east, and in the present aspect of the sun the light streamed down through the doorway as our lantern had done, throwing a flood of light upon the damp grass beyond. There was a strange suggestion in the open door—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity—all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing: or be kept out—by nothing! You could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. I remembered, however, what Simson said about the juniper, with a little smile on my own mind as to the inaccuracy of recollection, which even a scientific man will be guilty of. I could see now the light of my lantern gleaming upon the wet glistening surface of the spiky leaves at the right hand—and he ready to go to the stake for it that it was the left!

I went round to make sure. And then I saw what he had said. Right or left there was no juniper at all. I was confounded by this, though it was entirely a matter of detail: nothing at all: a bush of brambles waving, the grass growing up to the very walls. But after all, though it gave me a shock for a moment, what did that matter? There were marks as if a number of footsteps had been up and down in front of the door; but these might have been our steps; and all was bright, and peaceful, and still. I poked about the other ruin—the larger ruins of the old house—for some time, as I had done before. There were marks upon the grass here and there, I could not call them footsteps, all about; but that told for nothing one way or another. I had examined the ruined rooms closely the first day. They were half filled up with soil and debris, withered brackens and bramble—no refuge for anyone there. It vexed me that Jarvis should see me coming from that spot when he came up to me for his orders. I don't know whether my nocturnal expeditions had got wind among the servants. But there was a significant look in his face. Something in it I felt was like my own sensation when Simson in the midst of his skepticism was struck dumb. Jarvis felt satisfied that his veracity had been put beyond question. I never spoke to a servant of mine in such a peremptory tone before. I sent him away "with a flea in his lug," as the man described it afterwards. Interference of any kind was intolerable to me at such a moment.

Simson came out to dinner, and when the house was all still, and most of the servants in bed, we went out and met Dr. Moncrieff, as we had appointed, at the head of the glen. Simson, for his part, was disposed to scoff at the doctor. "If there are to be any spells, you know, I'll cut the whole concern," he said. I did not make him any reply. I had not invited him; he could go or come as he pleased. He was very talkative, far more than suited my humor, as we went on. "One thing is certain, you know, there must be some human agency," he said. "It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about." "If it's the same to you," I said, "I wish you'd keep all that to yourself, Simson. It doesn't suit my state of mind." "Oh, I hope I know how to respect idiosyncrasy," he said. The very tone of his voice irritated me beyond measure. These scientific fellows, I wonder people put up with them as they do, when you have no mind for their cold-blooded confidence. Dr. Moncrieff met us about eleven o'clock, the same time as on the previous night. He was a large man, with a

venerable countenance and white hair—old, but in full vigor, and thinking less of a cold night walk than many a younger man. He had his lantern as I had. We were fully provided with means of lighting the place, and we were all of us resolute men. We had a rapid consultation as we went up, and the result was that we divided to different posts. Dr. Moncrieff remained inside the wall—if you can call that inside where there was no wall but one. Simson placed himself on the side next the ruins, so as to intercept any communication with the old house, which was what his mind was fixed upon. I was posted on the other side. To say that nothing could come near without being seen was self-evident. It had been so also on the previous night. Now, with our three lights in the midst of the darkness, the whole place seemed illuminated. Dr. Moncrieff's lantern, which was a large one, without any means of shutting up—an old fashioned lantern with a pierced and ornamental top—shone steadily, the rays shooting out of it upward into the gloom. He placed it on the grass, where the middle of the room, if this had been a room, would have been. The usual effect of the light streaming out of the doorway was prevented by the illumination which Simson and I on either side supplied. With these differences, everything seemed as on the previous night.

And what occurred was exactly the same, with the same air of repetition, point for point, as I had formerly remarked. I declare that it seemed to me as if I were pushed against, put aside, by the owner of the voice as he paced up and down in his trouble—though these are perfectly futile words, seeing that the stream of light from my lantern, and that from Simson's taper, lay broad and clear, without a shadow, without the smallest break, across the entire breadth of the grass. I had ceased even to be alarmed, for my part. My heart was rent with pity and trouble—pity for the poor suffering human creature that moaned and pleaded so, and trouble for myself and my boy. God! if I could not find any help—and what help could I find?—Roland would die.

We were all perfectly still till the first outburst was exhausted, as I knew (by experience) it would be. Dr. Moncrieff, to whom it was new, was quite motionless on the other side of the wall, as we were in our place. My heart had remained almost at its usual beating during the voice. I was used to it; it did not rouse all my pulses as it did at first. But just as it threw itself sobbing at the door (I cannot use other words), there suddenly came something which sent the blood coursing through my veins and my heart into my mouth. It was a voice inside the wall—the minister's well-

known voice. I would have been prepared for it in any kind of adjuration, but I was not prepared for what I heard. It came out with a sort of stammering, as if too much moved for utterance. "Willie, Willie! Oh, God preserve us! is it you?"

These simple words had an effect upon me that the voice of the invisible creature had ceased to have. I thought the old man, whom I had brought into this danger, had gone mad with terror. I made a dash round to the other side of the wall, half crazed with the thought. He was standing where I had left him, his shadow thrown vague and large upon the grass by the lantern which stood at his feet. I lifted my own light to see his face as I rushed forward. He was very pale, his eyes wet and glistening, his mouth quivering with parted lips. He neither saw nor heard me. We that had gone through this experience before had crouched towards each other to get a little strength to bear it. But he was not even aware that I was there. His whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness. He held out his hands, which trembled, but it seemed to me with eagerness, not fear. He went on speaking all the time. "Willie, if it is you—and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan—Willie, lad! why come ye here frightening them that know you not? Why came ye not to me?"

He seemed to wait for an answer. When his voice ceased, his countenance, every line moving, continued to speak. Simson gave me another terrible shock, stealing into the open doorway with his light as much awestricken, as wildly curious as I. But the minister resumed, without seeing Simson, speaking to someone else. His voice took a tone of expostulation—

"Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!—I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man. The sobbing voice had begun to resume its cries. He made a step forward, calling out the last words in a voice of command. "I forbid ye! Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! go home! Do you hear me?—me that christened ye, that have struggled with ye, that have wrestled for ye with the Lord!" Here the loud tones of his voice sank into tenderness. "And her too, poor woman! poor woman; her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. Do you hear me, lad? go after her there. He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! if you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's

gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door."

He stopped to get his breath: and the voice had stopped, not as it had done before, when its time was exhausted and all its repetitions said, but with a sobbing catch in the breath as if overruled. Then the minister spoke again, "Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie, you've liked the beggarly elements all your days. Be done with them now. Go home to the Father—the Father! Are you hearing me?" Here the old man sank down upon his knees, his face raised upwards, his hands held up with a tremble in them, all white in the light in the midst of the darkness. I resisted as long as I could, though I cannot tell why—then I, too, dropped upon my knees. Simson all the time stood in the doorway, with an expression, his eyes wild, staring. It seemed to be to him, that image of blank ignorance and wonder, that we were praying. All the time the voice, with a low arrested sobbing, lay just where he was standing as I thought.

"Lord," the minister said—"Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations. The mother he cries to is with Thee. Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!"

I sprang forward to catch something in my arms that flung itself wildly within the door. The illusion was so strong, that I never paused till I felt my forehead graze against the wall and my hands clutch the ground—for there was nobody there to save from falling, as in my foolishness I thought. Simson held out his hand to me to help me up. He was trembling and cold, his lower lip hanging, his speech almost inarticulate. "It's gone," he said, stammering—"it's gone!" We leant upon each other for a moment, trembling so much both of us that the whole scene trembled as if it were going to dissolve and disappear; and yet as long as I live I will never forget it—the shining of the strange lights, the blackness all round, the kneeling figure with all the whiteness of the light concentrated on its white venerable head and uplifted hands. A strange solemn stillness seemed to close all round us. By intervals a single syllable, "Lord! Lord!" came from the old minister's lips. He saw none of us, nor thought of us. I never knew how long we stood, like sentinels guarding him at his prayers, holding our lights in a confused dazed way, not knowing what we did. But at last he rose from his knees, and standing up at his full height, raised his arms, as the Scotch manner is at the end of a religious service, and solemnly gave the

apostolical benediction—to what? to the silent earth, the dark woods, the wide breathing atmosphere—for we were but spectators gasping an Amen!

It seemed to me that it must be the middle of the night as we all walked back. It was in reality very late. Dr. Moncrieff put his arm into mine. He walked slowly, with an air of exhaustion. It was as if we were coming from a deathbed. Something hushed and solemnized the very air. There was that sense of relief in it which there always is at the end of a death struggle. And nature persistent, never daunted, came back in all of us, as we returned into the ways of life. We said nothing to each other, indeed, for a long time; but when we got clear of the trees and reached the opening near the house, where we could see the sky, Dr. Moncrieff himself was the first to speak. "I must be going," he said, "it's very late, I'm afraid. I will go down the glen, as I came."

"But not alone. I am going with you, doctor."

"Well, I will not oppose it. I am an old man, and agitation wearies more than work. Yes; I'll be thankful of your arm. Tonight, colonel, you've done me more good turns than one."

I pressed his hand on my arm, not feeling able to speak. But Simson, who turned with us, and who had gone along all this time with his taper flaring, in entire unconsciousness, came to himself, apparently at the sound of our voices, and put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame. "Let me carry your lantern," he said; "it is heavy." He recovered with a spring, and in a moment, from the awe stricken spectator he had been, became himself skeptical and cynical. "I should like to ask you a question," he said. "Do you believe in purgatory, doctor? It's not in the tenets of the church, so far as I know."

"Sir," said Dr. Moncrieff, "an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God."

"But I thought that was in this life. I am no theologian—"

"Sir," said the old man, again with a tremor in him which I could feel going over all his frame, "if I saw a friend of mine within the gates of hell, I would not despair but his Father would take him by the hand still—if he cried like *yon*."

"I allow it is very strange—very strange. I cannot see through it. That there must be human agency, I feel sure. Doctor, what made you decide upon the person and the name?"

The minister put out his hand with the impatience which a man might show if he were asked how he recognized his brother. "Tuts!"

he said, in familiar speech—then more solemnly, "How should I not recognize a person that I know better—far better—than I know you?"

"Then you saw the man?"

Dr. Moncrieff made no reply. He moved his hand again with a little impatient movement, and walked on, leaning heavily on my arm. And we went on for a long time without another word, threading the dark paths, which were steep and slippery with the damp of the winter. The air was very still—not more than enough to make a faint sighing in the branches, which mingled with the sound of the water to which we were descending. When we spoke again, it was about indifferent matters—about the height of the river, and the recent rains. We parted with the minister at his own door, where his old housekeeper appeared in great perturbation, waiting for him. "Eh, me, minister! the young gentleman will be worse?" she cried.

"Far from that—better. God bless him!" Dr. Moncrieff said.

I think if Simson had begun again to me with his questions, I should have pitched him over the rocks as we returned up the glen; but he was silent, by a good inspiration. And the sky was clearer than it had been for many nights, shining high over the trees, with here and there a star faintly gleaming through the wilderness of dark and bare branches. The air, as I have said, was very soft in them, with a subdued and peaceful cadence. It was real, like every natural sound, and came to us like a hush of peace and relief. I thought there was a sound in it as of the breath of a sleeper, and it seemed clear to me that Roland must be sleeping, satisfied and calm. We went up to his room when we went in. There we found the complete hush of rest. My wife looked up out of a doze, and gave me a smile; "I think he is a great deal better: but you are very late," she said in a whisper, shading the light with her hand that the doctor might see his patient. The boy had got back something like his own color. He woke as we stood all round his bed. His eyes had the happy half-awakened look of childhood, glad to shut again, yet pleased with the interruption and glimmer of the light. I stooped over him and kissed his forehead, which was moist and cool. "All is well, Roland," I said. He looked up at me with a glance of pleasure, and took my hand and laid his cheek upon it, and so went to sleep.

For some nights after, I watched among the ruins, spending all the dark hours up to midnight patrolling about the bit of wall

which was associated with so many emotions; but I heard nothing, and saw nothing beyond the quiet course of nature: nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard again. Dr. Moncrieff gave me the history of the youth, whom he never hesitated to name. I did not ask, as Simson did, how he recognized him. He had been a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and “led away,” as people say. All that we had heard had passed actually in life, the doctor said. The young man had come home thus a day or two after his mother died—who was no more than the housekeeper in the old house—and distracted with the news, had thrown himself down at the door and called upon her to let him in. The old man could scarcely speak of it for tears. To me it seemed as if—heaven help us, how little do we know about anything!—a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical—as if the unseen actor could not exceed or vary, but was bound to reenact the whole. One thing that struck me, however, greatly, was the likeness between the old minister and my boy in the manner of regarding these strange phenomena. Dr. Moncrieff was not terrified, as I had been myself, and all the rest of us. It was no “ghost,” as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him—but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain—if it was a spirit—this voice out of the unseen—was a poor fellow creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. He spoke to me quite frankly about it when he got better. “I knew Father would find out some way,” he said. And this was when he was strong and well, and all idea that he would turn hysterical or become a seer of visions had happily passed away.

I must add one curious fact which does not seem to me to have any relation to the above, but which Simson made great use of, as the human agency which he was determined to find somehow. We had examined the ruins very closely at the time of these occurrences; but afterwards, when all was over, as we went casually about them one Sunday afternoon in the idleness of that unemployed day, Simson with his stick penetrated an old window which had been entirely blocked up with fallen soil. He jumped down into it in great excitement, and called me to follow. There we found a little hole—for it was more a hole than a room—entirely hidden

under the ivy ruins, in which there was a quantity of straw laid in a corner, as if someone had made a bed there, and some remains of crusts about the floor. Someone had lodged there, and not very long before, he made out; and that this unknown being was the author of all the mysterious sounds we heard he is convinced. "I told you it was human agency," he said, triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing, while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. "I was puzzled myself—I could not make it out—but I always felt convinced human agency was at the bottom of it. And here it is—and a clever fellow he must have been," the doctor says.

Bagley left my service as soon as he got well. He assured me it was no want of respect; but he could not stand "them kind of things," and the man was so shaken and ghastly that I was glad to give him a present and let him go. For my own part, I made a point of staying out the time, two years, for which I had taken Brentwood; but I did not renew my tenancy.

SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED":

Bela Lugosi, gangster, electric shock
Lon Chaney, spy, poison dart
Peter Lorre, maniac, strangling
Boris Karloff, smuggler, gun
Sydney Greenstreet, forger, dagger

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



Illustration by Patricia Olstad

Herbert Resnicow brings back Norma and Alexander Gold, proprietors of Alexander Magnus Gold Associates, Consultants, in **The Gold Gamble** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 248 pp). Norma hasn't left the house since she was involved in a shooting, and her friend Pearl has conned her own husband, lawyer Burton Hanslik, and Alexander into being angels for a revival of *Guys and Dolls* in the hope that being involved in a play will get Norma out and about again. Then the star's understudy, bimbo girlfriend of co-producer Maxwell Sapphire, is murdered by being smothered with cold cream. *That* gets Norma out and investigating, since the star, an old school friend, is the prime suspect. This is not only a witty and entertaining murder mystery, it gives the reader some insight into the staging of a Broadway revival. Most entertaining.

Sister Mary Helen, the creation of Sister Carol Anne O'Marie, returns in **The Missing Madonna** (Delacorte, \$15.95, 253 pp) to investigate the disappearance of a friend and fellow member of OWLs (Older Women's League). Why shouldn't she believe the landlord, who says Erma Duran went to St. Louis to visit relatives? Because Erma just would not leave without her lucky religious medal, let alone without telling anyone. Homicide Inspector Kate Murphy and her partner pass her off to a curmudgeon in the Missing Persons Bureau, partly to get rid of her and partly to get

even with Inspector Ron Honore. Mary Helen does drive Honore to distraction but, like Murphy and Gallagher, he begins to feel that the elderly nun may have a line on a potential crime. Meanwhile, Mary Helen enlists the aid of her fellow nuns, Sisters Eileen and Ann, to delve into the mystery. Good San Francisco settings, a wonderful bunch of characters in the OWL membership, and development of the continuing subordinate story line about Kate and husband Jack Bassetti make this the best yet in the Sister Mary Helen series.

Dave Brandstetter is retiring. He has written hundreds of insurance executives to that effect, but it doesn't stop him from doing one last investigation as a favor to Tracy Davis, public defender in San Pedro. Tracy's half-brother, an unlikable coward whom we never meet, has been accused of murdering Le Van Minh, owner of the marina where ninety people live on ramshackle houseboats. The motive: Le wants to sell the marina, and the new owners will evict the houseboats. As a result Dave risks life and limb to penetrate the Vietnamese "Mafia." Joseph Hansen has done his usual excellent job in **Obedience** (Mysterious Press, \$16.95, 202 pp), the tenth in the Brandstetter series. The plot and motivations are convoluted, as one would expect when a gay insurance investigator investigates multiple homicides in the Vietnamese community. We get a taste of the strength of the new underworld occupied by Vietnamese exiles and criminals. An excellent portrait of Brandstetter, aging and aware that he is no longer capable of surviving without injury to himself or his friends if he continues as a detective, imbues the book with interesting conflict. I would hate to see Dave retire—perhaps all he needs is a vacation to recharge?

Robert Mitchell was a ski champion until Vietnam and a mangled leg. Now he runs Tate Pharmaceuticals, which is making a fortune from an artificial sweetener. All the Tate family hate Mitchell, since he spends a lot of the profits on research into drugs that treat rare diseases and, therefore, do not make large profits. So the Tates, for the first time in a long time, have united to oust Mitchell. Coincidentally, nine people are poisoned by a designer drug that seems to have found its way into the sweetener packets in restaurants on both coasts. Author Sam Stewart takes us from Guatemala to San Moritz, Paris, Majorca, and Los Angeles in **Payback** (Pocket, \$3.95, 146 pp). The characters are well-drawn though not necessarily all likable. But even Mitchell's shortcomings, which are many and surprising, are in-

teresting in their presentation and development.

Martin H. Greenberg and Francis M. Nevins, Jr., have put together another collection of short stories with a common theme—U.S. presidents as amateur detectives. **Mr. President, Private Eye** (Ballantine, \$3.50, 275 pp) stars thirteen presidents, from George Washington through Gerald Ford, in twelve stories by authors ranging from Dorothy B. Hughes (Martin Van Buren was her P.I.) to Stuart Kaminsky (who wrote about Harry S Truman). All of these previously published short stories fit the fictional detecting into actual historic events, with the more successful stories involving earlier, lesser known periods and presidents. My favorite was the Edward D. Hoch story, "The Tragedy of 1799," which starts with a mystery that occurred shortly before George Washington died of pneumonia in 1799 (he was no longer president) and finishes when Abraham Lincoln solves the mystery in 1849 (long before he was elected). A good collection for those interested in American historical mysteries.

An espionage/mystery in the British tradition is Eileen Dewhurst's **The Sleeper** (Doubleday, \$12.95, 183 pp). Olga Trent made a deal with the KGB in order to get an exit visa so that she could join her British husband. And now, ten years later, she is contacted by telephone and told that her services are needed. She doesn't know what they want her to do, and she contemplates suicide before she decides to try to foil the plot, whatever it might be. An interesting character study of a desperate woman who is trying to save her life and her way of life, knowing that the KGB is much more powerful than she.

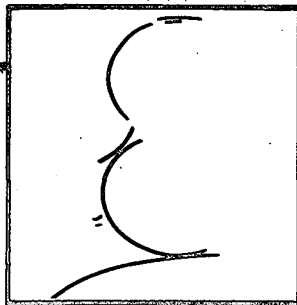
The sixth entry in J. A. Jance's series about Detective J. P. Beaumont of the Seattle Police Department finds Beau acting, reluctantly, as technical advisor for a film being shot on the Seattle waterfront. He hasn't gotten along well with the director or the director's assistant, and neither will take his technical advice, so the film is probably going to make the Seattle P.D. look like a bunch of jerks. To top it off, he is blamed when the shoot goes overtime because the body of a missing ironworker floats ashore. **A More Perfect Union** (Avon, \$3.50, 217 pp) takes the reader inside the ironworkers' union in Seattle as well as the movie set. As in the previous five J. P. Beaumont novels, Seattle and its surrounding small towns are the setting, with the continuing cast of Beaumont, his ex-partner Ron Peters' two little girls, and Beau's lawyer Ralph Ames. Beau continues to grow in his part, learning as much about himself in this book as he does about the crime.

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



A detective sometimes needs a sixth sense to unravel a criminal whodunit. In *See No Evil, Hear No Evil*, the heroes, a deaf man and a blind man accused of a murder, find it even more necessary. And together Dave Lyons (Gene Wilder) and Wally Karew (Richard Pryor) have that extra something they need to make sense of the murder plot they've unwittingly been drawn into.

When the police arrive at the scene of a fatal shooting, in the lobby of a New York City office building, they mistakenly arrest Dave and Wally, the only two witnesses to the crime. While the audience also witnesses the murder, we are not

let in on the motive for it. The working out of this mystery is the vehicle that propels what is basically a very funny buddy movie.

Dave, who cannot hear but who can read lips as long as the person speaking is facing him, meets Wally when the latter comes to work for him at his newsstand. One morning Wally's bookie arrives to collect a debt, but before he can get the money he's gunned down by an attractive woman with a pair of legs that won't quit. Dave hears nothing but turns just in time to notice a pair of killer legs leaving the lobby. Wally hears shots and the clunk of high heels on a hard floor and gets a whiff of a very distinctive

perfume as the woman rushes by him. But of course he sees nothing.

The pals not only have a hard time convincing the police of their innocence but are being pursued by the killers, who are looking for a mysteriously important gold coin, dumped by the bookie just before his death.

Their symbiotic relationship is illustrated hilariously when the pair purloin a police patrol car to escape from the villains who are trying to rub them out. With Dave's hands cuffed behind his back, the blind Wally is forced to take a turn behind the wheel. The result is a mad-cap chase through the streets of New York and an escape

from both the law and the out-laws.

The men in blue enlist more men in blue, and the criminals contact the other members of their network. But Wally and Dave have only Wally's sister Adele (Kirsten Childs) to assist them. And her efforts end up complicating matters further.

Some light is shed on the motive when we finally meet the criminal mastermind, in a scene that provides us with an interesting twist and a doublecross.

Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor complement each other well. Wilder has the calm, quiet demeanor of a man who knows his limitations. Pryor, on the other hand, is a hyperactive loudmouth out to prove he can do anything. At one point he helps a blind man across a city street—literally the blind leading the blind. Joan Severance as the killer, Eve, is especially notable. Had she not said a word in *See No Evil, Hear No Evil*, Severance would still have the provocative presence of an alluring assailant.

Although our heroic duo would never be mistaken for Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, these talented comic actors are able to use a story of the wrongly accused to spin an entertaining yarn.



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Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder in
See No Evil, Hear No Evil.

THE STORY THAT WON

The April Mysterious won by Wm. Jason Jones mentions go to Pat Baker York; W. R. Robinson of M. Winkler of Franklin, Howard of Alhambra, yer of Vancouver, Canada;



and Nancy Mackinnon of Fort Worth, Texas. Photograph contest was of Plano, Texas. Honorable of Trumansburg, New Ripley, Tennessee; Peter Pennsylvania; Jeanne California; Sharon Lockyer of Vancouver, Canada;

© N. Jay Jaffee

BROTHERLY LOVE AMONG THE RUINS by Wm. Jason Jones

Lieutenant Leo Notact, of the Acropolis police, removed his lollipop. "Whaddya know, baby?"

"Louie Grantakis, lieutenant. I'm with the local newspaper, *The Grecian Formula*. We cover 'Athens to Athens, dusk to dusk.'"

"So who's watering the bushes with his tears?"

"The brother of the deceased. He and his sister restored ancient ruins, such as this temple."

"That explains the scaffolding."

"Yeah, he calls it a shared obsession—a labor of love."

"You do good work," Notact said. "So what's sis doing up there between those slats, with a hole in her back?"

I shook my head. "Mr. Papandopoulos discovered her upon returning from his afternoon java break."

I motioned for the young man to join us.

Picking up a broken band of wood, I asked, "Mr. Papandopoulos, what's this frieze doing on the floor?"

His tears ebbed. His face reddened. "Ionic! My sister was changing these graceful Doric columns to Ionic."

"How? Making them taller? Narrowing their shafts?"

"That's right. Sheer butchery."

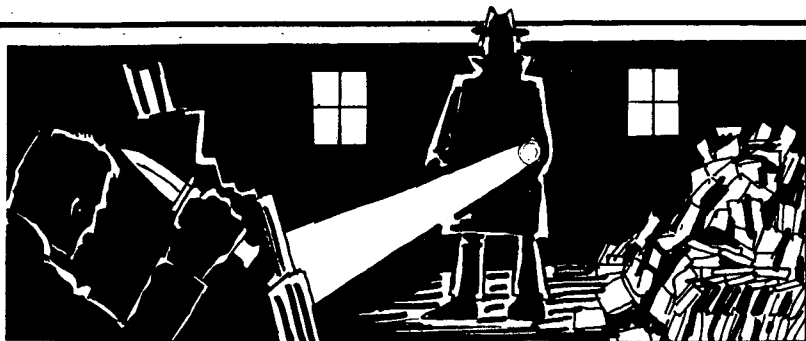
"But it's an improvement," I insisted.

"You are an abomination!" His voice grew shrill. "You deserve to die, too." From within his tunic he drew a knife with the longest blade I had ever seen.

As he drove the knife forward, Lieutenant Notact grabbed his elbow and wrested the knife from his grasp. Then Notact turned to me and grinned.

"And how did you come to know so much about ancient ruins?"

"Oh, didn't I mention my job at the newspaper?" I gasped. "I'm a columnist."



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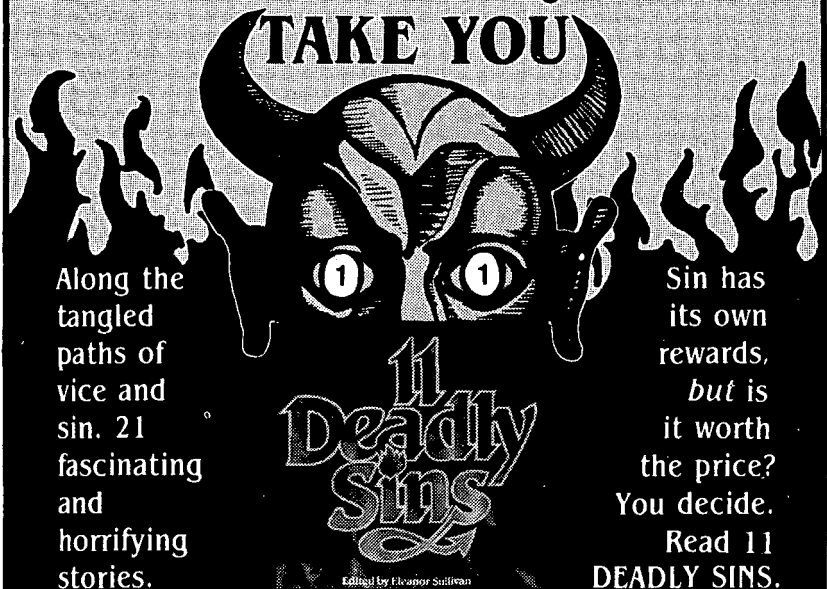
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